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BOWLDER BILL; or, THE MAN FROM TAOS.

BY "BUCKSKIN SAM"—Major Sam S. Hall,

AUTHOR OF "DIAMOND DICK," "THE TERRIBLE TONKAWAY," "KIT CARSON, JR.," "BIG FOOT WALLACE," ETC.



LIKE A FLASH HE SHOT PAST HIM, CLUTCHING THE LETTER.

Boulder Bill;

OR,

THE MAN FROM TAOS.

A TALE OF THE NEW MEXICO MINES.

BY MAJOR SAM. S. HALL

("BUCKSKIN SAM"),

AUTHOR OF "STAMPEDE STEVE," "DANDY DAVE," "MOUNTAIN MOSE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

"ALL BOATS HAVE THEIR DAY ON THE MISSISSIPPI."

SEATED in one of the richly upholstered chairs of the ladies' cabin of a magnificent steamboat, the River Rover, his head lying back, partly sustained by his hand and arm, his eyes closed, was a man of perhaps fifty-five years of age.

The boat is northward bound, and will be due in St. Louis about sunset; but any one acquainted with the landmarks would know that she was behind time.

The passenger, who has just been introduced, was slightly above the medium height, with florid face and gray hair. His eyes were deep set, his nose of the Roman type, and his form inclined to thinness, although large-boned and evidently muscular.

Such was Major Munroe Malcolm, a wealthy ex-planter, formerly of Louisiana, but at the time of which we are speaking, a resident of St. Louis.

The family of the major consisted simply of himself and an only child—a daughter—Mrs. Malcolm having died some years previous.

A life of inactivity and idleness, such as that upon which the retired planter entered, was, he declared, very irksome to him; but the true state of affairs with Major Malcolm was that he was ruled by the almighty dollar, and although he was well-to-do, he immediately turned his attention to speculating in cotton, railway, and steamboat stocks; which business, much to the regret of his daughter, not only drew him away from his home a great portion of the time, but kept him in a constant state of worry and nervous excitement.

The major was now returning from New Orleans, whither his daughter had insisted on accompanying him; his object having been the disposal of a large quantity of cotton.

But we must now describe Maude Malcolm.

Seated far off, gazing down the broad river, and sweeping the banks with no careless eye, the young girl occasionally cast a glance of tender solicitude toward her father, to ascertain if he still slept. She was but seventeen years of age, just budding into womanhood, and as beautiful as can well be imagined.

Unlike her father, her features were purely Grecian, and her complexion fair, with a peachy bloom upon her cheeks that denoted health. Her eyes were dark blue, large and luminous; while dark-brown hair, in great profusion, was arranged in charming *neglige*.

Perfect in form and feature, and attired in the height of fashion, thus sat the planter's daughter; but the fair Maude was evidently ill at ease, and somewhat apprehensive. She had noticed the unusual trembling of the mammoth boat, besides the creaking and groaning of the timbers. Had she been in a position to view the huge furnaces, and observe the flitting of the negroes before the flames, as they fed the roaring fires, the maiden would, without doubt, have been even more concerned than she was.

There were but few passengers on the promenade deck, or in the ladies' cabin; for the reason, probably, that they were getting their belongings in readiness for landing, expecting to reach St. Louis in about an hour's time.

At length Maude Malcolm arose from her chair, placing a most bewitching hat carelessly upon her head, and holding one finger between the leaves of a book she had a short time previous been perusing, she stepped gracefully toward the chair occupied by her father. The young girl was one who would claim attention and admiration, even were she in a throng of a thousand beauties.

As she arose, a young man, who had been sitting, leaning his head upon his hand, which clasped the rail, straightened himself in his chair, and gazed after her admiringly. This was but for a moment. He then cast a furtive, somewhat anxious glance at the clouds of smoke that rolled overhead, and arose at once to a standing position.

He was as handsome in his way, as was Maude Malcolm in hers. Nearly six feet in height, with a superb physique, straight as a lance shaft, and evidently of great strength and agility. This last was indicated by his manner of rising, and by the glance of his eye.

He had a finely formed head, aquiline nose, intelligent, hazel eyes, curling dark hair, a firm mouth and chin, and white even, teeth.

Such was William Stone.

Had one paid particular attention to this young man when the boat started from New

Orleans, and at such times as he had been by himself, beyond the sight and influence of Maude Malcolm, his face would have been a study; and one that, considering his age—not more than two and twenty—would have awakened some surprise.

At times he was listless and moody, his thoughts evidently far from pleasant. At others, he would seem disdainful and reckless; and then a look of grief would settle in his eye, and on his handsome face.

These and like kindred expressions would lead a careful observer to decide that young Stone was a lone wanderer—a waif, who was drifting westward, with no particular aim or object—and that some sad experiences had been recently undergone by him, that had weighed down his natural vivacity, cheerfulness, and ambition.

Such, indeed, was the case; for, but one month previous to his taking passage on the River Rover, William Stone had buried his only near relative, his mother.

Alone now in the world, and being naturally of an affectionate disposition, it was no wonder that after losing parents, brothers, and sisters, by that terrible scourge of the Sunny South, yellow fever, he should feel not only dejected and grief-stricken, but regardless of everything around him, and bitter against what he considered his unjust lot in life.

But, from the first moment that the gloomy young man fixed his eyes upon the angelic face of Maude Malcolm, he experienced a feeling that was new and strange. By some subtle magnetism, that amazed him, he found that he was made aware of her presence in his vicinity when he could not see her, unless by turning completely about.

He had examined the boat's register, and thus ascertained her name, and that of her father. He had also, by overhearing the conversation of others in connection with the major, learned that the latter was considered a very wealthy man, and that Maude was his only child.

Being himself of limited means, although of good birth and education, young Stone had not put himself in the way of forming the acquaintance of either Major Malcolm or his daughter.

Several times had Maude caught his glance, and blushed vividly as she dropped her eyes; in fact, the young man had frequently, when nursing his "blues," found, upon quickly glancing around him, as he threw off these feelings, that the beautiful girl, who had so strongly impressed him, had been gazing in his direction, with a sympathetic look, not unmixed with admiration.

He felt, upon these occasions, a thrill of intense joy, which banished, for the time, his dejection; but this feeling, in turn, was drowned by thoughts of the absurdity of his entertaining it.

Maude Malcolm glided toward her sleeping father, at the same moment that this young man arose from his chair in some apprehension caused by the trembling and jerking of the boat.

This was, however, banished for the moment by discovering that the young lady had dropped her handkerchief, half-way between her chair and that of her father.

Here was, at last, a chance to glance into her speaking eyes, and hear her musical voice, a chance not to be lost. He stepped forward, picked up the kerchief, and the next moment stood, bat in hand, by her side.

"Allow me, miss," he said, politely, "to return your handkerchief."

The young girl started, on being thus addressed. She turned, looked at the young man before her, and after a brief pause, replied:

"Thank! You are very kind."

In that flitting glance of the eye, that modulation of voice, each felt intuitively that they were destined to know more of each other—knew, indeed, that they had met their fate; for admiration and love were manifested by eye and tongue of both.

Major Malcolm still slept soundly.

Will Stone, somewhat embarrassed by not having previously been favored with an introduction, turned to depart, as he replied:

"Pray do not mention so slight a favor."

But Maude quickly arrested his steps.

Evidently she resolved that she would take advantage of her anxiety in regard to the boat, and in this way form the acquaintance of the handsome stranger.

"Mr.—" she began hesitatingly.

"Stone is my name—William Stone," said the young man, as he passed his card.

"And mine is Maude Malcolm."

"Most happy, Miss Malcolm, to form your acquaintance. But you seem anxious. I trust that Major Malcolm is not ill."

"Thank you very much. Papa is not unwell, but is somewhat fatigued. I wished, however, to ask you if you had observed anything unusual about the steamer? Are we not going at great speed? And are not the engines and boilers being overtaxed?"

The young man's lips parted as he was about to reply, but Maude was answered from a different and much less agreeable source.

The boilers spoke for themselves; for a most

terrific explosion burst forth, with deafening sound.

Then came the hissing of steam, the crash of timbers, and the crackling of flames, mingled with shrieks and cries of agony.

"Papa! Oh, papa!"

Thus cried Maude Malcolm as she felt the arms of Will Stone clasp about her, as smoke and steam shut out all from view. Then with a cry of anguish and terror, the poor maiden sunk, limp and senseless, her head upon the young man's shoulder, and her arms instinctively clasping his neck.

CHAPTER II.

OUT OF THE HURLY-BURLY.

THE River Rover floated down stream, a complete wreck, only about thirty feet of the stern remaining unshattered.

The air was filled with a black mass of smoke, through which shot the fierce fire of the explosion; also the boilers in fragments, and the debris of the boat, all falling with great splash and spatter into the river, and even upon the adjacent bank.

Men, women and children were blown, in a mangled state, in all directions, being instantly overtaken by death; while others less fortunate lay maimed and shrieking, soon to be devoured by the raging flames!

Many were also struggling in the water, having been hurled thither unharmed; or else, having sprung, in their frenzy of terror, into the river.

The, but a moment before, beautiful River Rover, that had cut the waters so proudly, lay a helpless wreck, an unsightly object, on the waters of the mighty river, with not more than a score of her passengers unharmed; and these with one exception, incapable of judgment or action, being dazed by terror, amid the hot steam and stifling smoke.

A more heart-rending scene could scarce be imagined. The boat was a floating pandemonium.

The one referred to, who retained his presence of mind, was William Stone.

As calm and cool in manner and movement, as it was possible for human being to be under such terrible circumstances, he stood.

A perfect hero was he, and with the opportunity to prove it.

And prove it, Will did.

His voice rung, clear as a bell, in a tone of command, directing those about the stern, in the blinding smoke and steam; while he bore the senseless form of Maude Malcolm quickly to a chair by the rail, placing the maiden in the same, and casting a light shawl, which he had previously noticed on her arm, over her head.

Rushing back, he clutched the form of her father, who had been struck by a piece of the woodwork, and bore him also astern.

Still directing the terrified passengers around him, Will slashed free a number of life-preservers from the netting, and passed one to each of the frantic men, women, and children. The steam, before reaching the stern, had become cooled.

Bidding them fasten the life-preservers about their bodies, and prepare to leap, at his signal, from the burning wreck, Will secured each to the major and his daughter.

By this time, the boat, which drifted fast with the current, swung around sufficiently for the smoke, steam, and heat, to be blown over the side, in place of astern.

Many people, drawn by the terrific explosion and flames, were now running wildly along the high bank, seemingly as frantic as those who were in such fearful danger upon the wreck.

Taking no notice of anything except the helpless and affrighted ones about him, Will began hurling chairs and settees overboard, as well as all the life-preservers he could find. He then cried out:

"Come, my friends! The time has arrived. It is our only hope. A few moments more, and the boat will swing back. Then the flames will rush aft, and we will be lost. Jump! Jump for your lives!"

Many, disregarding these words, still remained, shrieking and wringing their hands. Some sprung into the muddy, seething waters. Those who did not, Will seized, and threw overboard without ceremony, Major Malcolm among the number.

At the moment that the young man cast the ex-planter into the river, Maude sprung to her feet, threw aside the shawl, and stood, with lips apart; her eyes filled with anguish and terror. At one glance, the young girl took in the horrors of the scene, and realized that she stood alone with this handsome stranger upon the burning wreck.

Will turned.

Their eyes met.

No words could express the emotions that were then transmitted from soul to soul.

"Papa?"

This, interrogatively, was all that the poor girl could articulate.

"Safe, I hope," said her companion. "Come, we will go to him."

Maude sprung into those strong, young arms.

Then upon the rail the young man bounded, and from that, darted afar out into the waters, avoiding those struggling beneath, and both sinking below the turbid surface.

Immediately they arose.

One glance showed Will that the fierce, raging flames now hid from view the very rail from which he had sprung but a moment before.

"Thank Heaven!"

These words burst from his lips.

"Papa—oh, papa!"

Again this was all that Maude uttered, and it was in the utmost agony, as she gazed pleadingly into the face of her preserver, who appeared, so utterly devoid did he seem of all fear, a very demi-god in her eyes.

But there was no time for words.

Will caught a view of a gray head, at some distance down the river.

The head hung listless over a life-preserver, and the gray hair was blood-stained.

With a few powerful strokes he reached this man, and soon drew him to the side of Maude.

"Be brave, now," he said, "and cling fast to your father. He is unconscious, caused by a blow from a flying fragment of timber, but he will soon recover. Do not be alarmed. There is no danger of your sinking. Be brave, I repeat, and assistance will soon arrive. I must help the helpless."

"Yes, go; and may Heaven bless and preserve you! I can take care of papa; I am myself again."

Without a word in reply, intense concern and deep sympathy in his gaze and manner, Will Stone lunged here and there, spurning the waters, and clutching the screaming women and children.

At length he collected them together, and secured floating debris for them to cling to, in order merely to give them confidence, for they were perfectly safe.

Nearly exhausted was the young man when he had gotten all free from the burning boat; and the same had floated down-stream, broadside to the current, now one mass of roaring flames, that shot heavenward crowned with inky clouds of smoke.

"Courage, Miss Malcolm!" Will cried out, as soon as he had assured all the terrified floaters that they would soon be rescued. He then swam to the side of the major and his daughter.

"Boats will soon reach us," he said, "and then all will be well. Has your father recovered?"

The question needed no reply, for Will at once perceived that Major Malcolm was still senseless, his head being supported by Maude's arm.

"No, Mr. Stone," she answered, in a voice that told her apprehension, while tears dimmed her beautiful eyes; "I fear he is badly injured. Oh, this is indeed terrible!"

"Do not despair, I implore you. Boats are now putting out from the bank. Allow me to support your father, and do you keep a grasp upon my arm. I must find out the extent of his injury."

So saying, Will Stone dashed water with his hand over the major's head, while Maude clung to him; and although the anguish she was suffering in regard to her father's condition was almost unspeakable, yet her eyes were fixed in admiration upon the handsome face so near her own.

A loud hissing and roaring sound at this moment broke forth, which drew the gaze of all down the stream, hushing the affrighted shrieks of the floaters. All now beheld the River Rover slowly sinking, while clouds of steam and smoke filled the air. Soon this veiled the wreck from view and then arose in air, revealing beneath only the rapid rushing waters.

All that remained of the magnificent boat was now in the muddy bottom of the mighty Father of Waters.

Again the cries of terrified women and children, as well as frightened men, filled the air; but soon loud yells of cheer rung out, and boats shot down the river, pulled by the strong arms of men who were eager to save life.

One by one the unfortunates—yet most fortunate—were lifted tenderly into these little crafts, which now approached our three friends.

Will had, by this time, succeeded in partly resuscitating the major, but his brain was benumbed, and he was unable to realize clearly his position or what had occurred.

The strange look in her father's eyes alarmed Maude not a little, but the cheering words of her preserver prevented her from losing command over herself. Major Malcolm was lifted into the boat, as was also his daughter. Will required but little assistance.

In half an hour more all the survivors were quartered at the residences of the rescuers, and were receiving every attention that could be given them.

The major, however, remained in the same dazed condition; a physician, who had been summoned, recommended that he be at once taken to his home in St. Louis, where he could receive the care and be benefited by the skill of

his own medical attendant. Every symptom, it was discovered, indicated a fracture of the skull.

A change of clothing having been furnished to all by the kindness of their rescuers, Will secured a pair of horses, a large carriage and a negro driver; then removing Major Malcolm to the vehicle, and assisting Maude into it also, the two supported the wounded man, while the negro drove slowly to the city. Darkness had enveloped the earth some time before the little party arrived at the major's home.

But ere the mantle of night prevented, the beautiful eyes of Maud Malcolm oft rested upon the winning face of the brave and daring stranger, who could be to her a stranger no longer; and the flush upon her cheeks, as well as the light in her eye, proclaimed the admiration and regard that ruled her mind. In no position could two young persons, newly met, be more drawn toward each other in a favorable light, than the one occupied by Will and Maude.

Both rendered every care and solicitude to the father of the latter; the former uttering, all the while, words of encouragement to the anxious maiden with whom he had so strangely become intimately acquainted. But the more the young man pondered over the situation, the more fully he realized that Maude Malcolm was far beyond his sphere—that the love which now surged in his breast and brain must be smothered.

Yet oft those little hands of Maude, in the young girl's solicitous care for the comfort of her father, would touch his own; they even rested tremblingly upon his in the darkness, thus banishing all his resolution, and bringing to the front an ecstasy of which he had never before dreamed.

Once he impulsively clasped that soft and trembling palm, and pressed it to his lips; an act he instantly regretted, and would not have dared do but for the darkness.

But the hand was not withdrawn, and in the gloom that shrouded them each seemed to read the other's very soul.

Soon the flashing lights of the great city shot into the windows of the carriage, and then eye gazed into eye; speaking, more plainly than language could express, a love that would last forever in the breasts of each—a love, that it would be sacrilege to endeavor to express in tame, unmeaning words.

And yet, had either of them known the agony of soul, the anguish of heart, the perils and terrors that were destined to come of that love, they would have looked upon the hour of their meeting, as the blackest and most to be regretted hour of their lives, through the consideration each had for the other.

CHAPTER III.

WESTWARD HO!

WILL STONE was greatly surprised at the extensive and park-like grounds, and the elegant and commodious mansion at which the carriage stopped. It was a magnificence quite beyond him, yet he felt he was Maude Malcolm's equal, in birth, if not in wealth. The road to gold was open to all, and he resolved that he would travel it.

Since the loss of his relatives, he had cast aside all ambition. Sorrow and loneliness had been eating like canker into his heart. He would have been content to go on drifting, without aim or energy, had he not met Maude Malcolm.

He had even entertained the idea of proceeding to some wild spot, and there leading the life of a recluse or hermit. But this was now over, and done with forever.

The physician, who had been called in, at once examined the major's wounded head. The injured man, as yet, gave no sign of recognition.

Will stood, with folded arms, by the bedside.

The medical man had insisted upon the absence of Maude, while he made the examination; and, with tearful eyes, the young girl retired to her chamber, to change the ill-fitting garments that she had borrowed after her rescue.

The heart of the maiden was in a strange state; now filled with anxiety in regard to her father's condition, although the physician had assured her there would be no serious results; and then, fluttering with a joy hitherto unknown to her, and which she could not define.

Will Stone had attracted her attention and admiration, previous to his having spoken to her; but, after he had, as she well knew, saved not only the lives of her father and herself, but many others, she felt for him something akin to adoration. In her eyes he was far above any man she had ever before met; and she had moved in the most brilliant circles in St. Louis, an acknowledged beauty and heiress, and therefore sought after by the handsomest and most gifted men.

All these, however, were now mere puppets in her eyes; and words were powerless to express her admiration for the brave and handsome stranger, so opportunely met on the River Rover. And well she knew that the feeling was mutual.

Every glance and act of the young man had betrayed this, although she felt positive that he

had striven, to the utmost power of his will, to repress an exhibition of the emotions that ruled his heart. Not for a moment did Maude trouble herself with a thought in connection with the social standing of the man in whom she felt such a deep interest.

Her love was too pure, and impulsive, and womanly, to perceive any superiority in herself, when compared with her gallant rescuer. He was a nobleman in thought and act, in mien and mold, and that was sufficient. She longed to know his history, for she had detected that half-hidden sorrow which depressed his heart, filling her with sympathy, and causing her to long for the ability and the opportunity to cheer him, and banish his melancholy.

Such were the thoughts of Maude Malcolm, while, with the assistance of her maid, she was making a change of attire, and not heeding the many questions which that privileged servant asked in regard to the startling events of the evening. Then came a summons from the physician, and Maude flew down the stairway, rushing into her father's apartment with great anxiety, to learn the doctor's prognosis.

Will Stone stood in the same attitude—his form erect, his arms folded, and his gaze fixed upon the face of the major, who was now quietly sleeping, from the effects of an opiate.

He heard the rustle of silk and garments, but he turned not; his eyes remaining fastened upon the face of the man whom he had saved from a terrible death.

Maude was most grateful to Will for this thoughtful consideration; for she felt that, had he gazed into her face, the physician, who turned to welcome her, would have detected her emotions. Her look of anxious inquiry was instantly answered.

"Your father, Miss Maude, received a severe blow, but his skull is not fractured. I have stitched the scalp wound and dressed it. He will, I feel confident, be in his natural state of health within a week, if he is kept quiet. I shall call in the morning."

"I am so thankful," exclaimed Maude, with great relief and joy expressed upon her face. "You can rest assured that papa will have the best of nursing. I am so rejoiced, for I had great fears about him. It was a most miraculous escape for us, and we owe our lives, as well as do many others, to Mr. Stone."

"Let me present Dr. Bigelow, Mr. Stone."

"We have waived ceremony, Miss Malcolm, and have been conversing while I have been engaged in my professional duties here, for I was curious to know about this terrible disaster."

"Mr. Stone, I am proud to make your acquaintance, and I trust that I shall have the pleasure of meeting you frequently."

The gentlemen shook hands, Will returning:

"Thanks, doctor; I am exceedingly pleased to know you. I shall remember you with gratitude and pleasure, as having so dexterously and skillfully attended to Major Malcolm. And as the physician and friend of those in whom, though strangers to me until to-day, I feel a deep interest, I shall value highly your friendship."

"As I shall, however, I presume, start westward in a day or two, we are not likely, I fear, soon to meet again."

The expression which this last remark of the young man brought upon Maude Malcolm's face was detected by the doctor, and he said, quickly:

"I cannot help hoping, Mr. Stone, that you may be prevailed upon to remain in St. Louis, at least until our friend here recovers. The major would, most certainly, feel hurt, and with good cause, if the one to whom he is so much indebted should take his leave before he could express to him the obligation he has laid him under. I know that Miss Malcolm will agree with me in this."

"But you must now excuse me, for I have some other patients to attend, and I dare say I shall be summoned to the scene of the disaster."

Thus saying, with a polite bow, the doctor left the apartment, and neither Maude nor Will had an opportunity to make any reply or remonstrance. As the door closed the young lady came toward Will, with extended hands, which he grasped in his. The deep love of each shot from eye to eye, and the maiden trembled with the intensity of her emotions.

The first words, however, were spoken by Maude, in a low tone; or rather, it was but a single word.

"Will," she said, softly.

"God bless you, Maude!"

For a few moments both remained silent.

"Maude Malcolm," said Will, at length, in his most impressive tones; "this is more than I had ever dared hope for. Maude, I love you!"

"It may be years, my darling, before I shall be able to express this to your father, and before the world. Let me tell you who and what I am."

"I am of an old, but sadly-fallen family, all of whom are now dead except myself. Wealth, in a worldly sense, is not mine. I was left a heritage of sorrow; left in clouds, through which the love-light from your eyes has pierced, and it has shown me a possible happiness, in which I had never before dared believe."

"But, as I have said, years must pass before I can hope to be in a position in which I can consider myself on something like an equal footing with yourself. However, I am young and strong, and with such an object, such a prize to gain, I feel that I can conquer worlds."

"I can, at least, seek a fortune in the gold and silver-fields of the West. I must not ask you to pledge yourself to me. I do not ask you if you love me. That is not necessary."

"I can read the precious truth in your eyes, but I know that the man who would wed your father's daughter, must have something more than a true heart to offer. But I must see you once more before I take my leave."

"Let it be, will you not, to-morrow evening at eight? Will you meet me in the vine-covered arbor which I noticed when we arrived?"

"Please do not talk in that way," pleaded the young girl. "You saved my life, and I am yours!"

"There can be no impropriety in my saying this. I feel as though I had known you always. You saved my father's life also. Can you think so ill of him, as to suppose that he would think of weighing anything in the balance with that?"

"If he does, or can, I do not! Your friendship is worth more to me than all the wealth of the world. What, then, must your love be to me?"

"Maude, you are excited, and cannot now judge of these matters. The recent startling occurrences have unfitted you for reasoning calmly. But I have asked you to meet me in the arbor to-morrow evening. Will you be there?"

"Yes, Will; you may depend upon me. But, pray to not think of leaving for the Far West!"

"We will speak of that another time, Maude; but, bear in mind, that your father—so report says—is one who loves gold too well to permit even the happiness of his daughter to overbalance the precious metal in the scales."

"But, even were this not the case, my darling, I would not for a moment entertain the idea of claiming your hand, while I am not possessed of sufficient means to keep you in the same station in which you now are."

"We are only paining ourselves by this interview. When you are more composed, you will acknowledge that I am in the right. I, too, shall suffer. I shall have to endure tortures of soul that will be ten times worse than any mere physical tortures; and that, from having met, and loved you!"

"But, Maude, let us hope for the best. I must go! Only remember to meet me to-morrow evening. It must be our last meeting, until success shall have crowned my efforts. Good-night, my darling—good-night!"

With a kiss upon the maiden's lips—she sinking into a chair, speechless and pale—Will Stone strode from the room, and the house; out into the dark night, striding from street to street, as in a dream. His brain was in a whirl. His brow was hot with fever. His very soul was steeped in such regret and sorrow, as none but a noble and honest man can feel, at having, though without any such intention and unavoidably, plunged a young and guileless heart into the depths of anguish and almost hopeless despair.

All this he read in the face of Maude Malcolm, as he gave her a farewell glance, when he left her presence; she standing by the bedside of her sleeping father, in that mansion, the equal of which, the young man vowed, should be his ere many years had flown.

CHAPTER IV.

LURKING IN THE SHADOWS.

It was not far from morning when Will Stone entered a respectable hotel, registered his name, and requested to be shown to his room.

At a glance the clerk recognized the name and extended his hand, saying, in a hearty manner:

"Mr. Stone, allow me to express my pleasure at meeting you! The name of the hero of the river disaster has been upon every tongue. But excuse me. I see you are greatly fatigued."

"Yes, thank you, I would like to retire at once. By the way, can you give me the card of a first class clothing house? You see what a fit these borrowed plumes are, and I shall not have time to get a suit made to order."

The clerk complied with Will's request, and then, touching the office bell, bade the young man good-night as he followed the bell-boy to his room.

The day following our friend provided himself with a complete outfit and then returned to the owner, by express, the suit of clothes, which had been loaned him.

His trunks, in which had been his papers, had been lost on the ill-fated boat; but his little all, in money, was in a belt around his waist.

Will found himself the center of an admiring circle, while he remained at the hotel, and he was bored by newspaper reporters and others until he was almost driven to discourtesy in his replies to the thousand and one questions that were put to him. He did, indeed, reply in an absent manner to some queries; for, as the reader will readily imagine, his mind was in a whirl in regard to the appointment he had made for the coming evening.

He longed for, yet dreaded, the coming night. He would meet her who was all the world to him, and he must bid her farewell, perhaps forever.

From the depths of the young man's soul he dreaded this parting. He felt that it would be a relief to be speeding over the iron rails, westward.

There was great excitement in St. Louis, at this time in regard to rich "finds" in the mining districts of New Mexico; and he felt that in that section of the country rested his one prospect of working up to the position in which he could claim Maude Malcolm as his wife.

He vowed that he would win both.

A man, who had such a prize in view, ought to be able to surmount all obstacles.

Previous to meeting with Maude, he had felt that he had nothing to live for; but now, life was precious to him on her account. To live, and to succeed, meant happiness for her, as well as himself.

Such reasonings braced Will up, as he walked toward the Malcolm mansion, as the hour appointed for meeting Maude drew near.

And what of her?

From a joyous, free, and careless maiden, she had, in one night, changed to a woman. Her natural joyousness had been supplanted by anxiety.

Strange, but true, it is, that one may meet a person, whose very existence hitherto was unknown, who will influence one, in a very short space of time against those who have been known, and loved, and respected for years.

That to which we refer was most certainly calculated to lessen the respect of Maude Malcolm for her father.

The latter had awakened, with a somewhat clouded recollection of a long and uncomfortable ride in a carriage. He recalled, clearly, being on the River Rover; but the explosion, and the time passed in the waters, were all a blank to him.

All this was explained to him by his daughter, who sought to give her father a favorable impression of the hero of the disaster. She also read to him the newspaper accounts of it. The physician, too, expressed himself most highly, to his patient, of Will Stone; so the major was not kept in the dark.

Dr. Bigelow watched Maude furtively all this time, and surmised the truth. From that moment, he resolved that he would do all in his power to favor the youthful pair.

We may imagine, however, the feelings of both Maude and the doctor, when Major Malcolm called for his check book, and filled out a check for twenty-five dollars, in favor of William Stone; bidding his daughter hand it to the young man when he should call, and to say to him that her father wished to be excused, as he did not feel like conversing with strangers.

Dr. Bigelow turned away, and glanced at Maude. The latter tore the check in pieces, and rushed from the room; but the major saw nothing of this. The doctor said not a word further. He saw that it would be useless.

Always avaricious, Maude and the physician both realized now, that Major Malcolm had suddenly become absolutely penurious. Even the necessary little luxuries ordered for him seemed to worry him. In the change, brought about by the blow he had received, he actually feared that, were his rescuer admitted to his chamber, he would demand a large reward.

All this caused the young girl great sorrow.

Not for the world, would she have Will know anything in regard to it.

But she felt assured that her father would not have thought of offering a pecuniary reward, had not his brain been affected by the wound upon his head.

How frequently does the course of true love run in this way.

At length, however, the eventful hour approached, and Maude stole out to the arbor; where she paced back and forth, the air being hazy, and the moon giving out but a dim light.

Not long had she to wait.

Soon the tall, symmetrical form of Will Stone appeared at the east entrance of the arbor. The maiden at once called out:

"Will! Oh, Will!"

"Maude, my darling, I have come!"

But there, crouched amid the vines, his eyes fixed upon the pair with murderous and jealous fury, his teeth clinched, and his whole form trembling with passion, was a swarthy, evil-faced man, apparently about the same age as Will.

Treacherous in looks, tall in figure, slender and agile, with a reckless air and a vengeful look—such was the lurker, who now crawled, Indian-like, to spy upon the lovers in the arbor.

The wonder was, that Will and Maude did not feel the villain's presence near them.

Well it was that they could not gaze into the future.

Not for the world would Maude have invited the young man in to see her father. She asked that he might be excused, as he was still far from well.

"Let us walk up and down here," Will suggested, and she agreed. The poor girl was only

too glad that he did not insist upon seeing the major.

"Let us talk of our future," he continued. "I have been most happy, and most miserable as well, since we parted. I walked the streets nearly all of last night, until worn with fatigue."

This, as we have seen, had been the case; and while Will had thus trodden the city's pavements, Maude had been seated by her father's couch, overcome with contending emotions.

"As I told you last evening," the young man resumed, "I have sworn that I will win gold, that so I may be able to claim you. I shall start, without delay, for New Mexico; and I would now ask if you think it prudent, or advisable, for us to correspond? I fear that, if a letter of mine should fall into your father's hands, it might cause trouble."

"Oh, Will! You must certainly write. I could not exist during your absence, did I not hear from you often. Here is the card and address of my most intimate friend. You can send your letters in her care. You see, I thought of this, and have prepared for it."

"Thanks, darling!"

And Will Stone took the proffered card, which he carefully placed in his pocket-book.

Long time the two lovers conversed, Will influencing Maude into a more hopeful state of mind; yet neither hinted at parting for some time, while the spy became furious, and grew stiff in the joints, yet not daring to move.

"Does it not strike you as very strange," said the young man, at length, "that we two should have met in so singular and romantic a manner, and that but a few hours since, yet now we are all in all to each other?"

"I had no aim before me then, but now I feel the energy and will that might move the world. Providentially, I was permitted to do you a service. Let us trust that the same Power, that enabled me to save your life, will lead us again together, never afterward to be separated."

"I must try to think so, Will; but the idea of parting is terrible to me. You will go out among new scenes and exciting ones, and will not feel it so deeply. But I must be brave and patient."

"I know you will, my darling! It is that thought which will brace me to the conflict before me. Remember this, and for my sake do not give way, Maude, but be brave!"

Clasping the maiden in his arms, both trembling with the intensity of their pent-up feelings, they remained thus for some moments. Then Will embraced the fair girl for the last time and darted from the arbor and the grounds and into the street. The world was before him, but it was dark.

With a moan of anguish Maude Malcolm sunk upon the arbor seat faint as death and incapable of speech or motion.

Not long did she remain thus.

Soon strange words were hissed in her ears—strange words, indeed, and terrible!

"You will never see Will Stone again, Maude Malcolm. He dies by my hand! I swear this by all the fiends!"

"I'll be his death, and the ruin of your father, and you shall be my slave!"

With one gasping, gurgling effort at articulation, Maude fainted.

The lurker hastened into the street, on the trail of his unsuspecting rival.

Half an hour afterward, as Will strode, almost as aimlessly as during the previous night, through the streets, and puffing furiously at a cigar, he was accosted in a gentlemanly manner, under the blaze of a gaslight, by a stranger, who asked that he might light his cigar by Will's.

This man seemed desirous to avoid showing his face, by keeping the brim of his hat pulled down to his eyes. He had been a little late, however, in doing this, for Will caught a view of a dark and treacherous-looking face, and black, snake-like eyes.

The object of the stranger was to photograph the face of the young man upon his mind, and this he was successful in doing; but Will also succeeded in getting a clear and well-defined impression of the stranger's features, though he little dreamed that he was destined, in the future, to suffer the most terrible torture of mind through the man whom he met under the gaslight in St. Louis when he was about setting out for the wilds of the West.

The stranger who accosted Will, and the spy who lurked amid the vines at the arbor, and who hissed his cowardly threats in Maude Malcolm's ear, striking terror to her very soul, were one and the same.

CHAPTER V.

THE RUFFIAN'S RESOLVE.

MAJOR MALCOLM, as was stated in the opening chapter, was extensively engaged in speculation; and, as a matter of course, he had been obliged to employ a confidential clerk.

This man was young, and a most adroit and cunning scoundrel, who had, for months, planned, plotted, and finally worked himself into the good graces and friendship of the major. This he had succeeded in doing, by

confidentially advising the latter to invest in certain stocks at certain times. This, proving a most profitable investment, had increased the ex-planter's capital by many thousands of dollars.

The plotter, although well posted in the stock business, had, however, no grounds for supposing that the advice he gave would prove profitable to his intended victim; but, luckily for him, he chose the right stock at the right time. In this way, he gained the gratitude and friendship of Major Malcolm, who eventually engaged him, at a fair salary, as his confidential clerk and adviser.

It is said that Satan favors his own, and this proved to be the case in these speculations; as Major Malcolm cleared quite a sum upon whatever stock his clerk advised him to purchase.

The name of this man was Robert Robertson; or, at least, that was the name by which he was known in St. Louis.

Almost any one, with the slightest knowledge of human nature, or character reading, would, without much hesitation, have pronounced this Robertson a designing and treacherous villain.

This was written plainly upon his features, and was revealed in his restless and wandering black eyes; but the major saw nothing in the fellow beyond cunning sagacity and business capacity, where others saw villainy, and the incipient stamp of crime. Besides this, he rejected very indignantly any advice or warning in regard to Robertson, when offered by his best friends. They, therefore, let matters proceed; knowing that the ex-planter could afford to lose quite a large sum, without in the least crippling his resources.

They even hoped he would do so, as a just return for his blind trust in, and regard for, one who, they felt positive, was a professional swindler, and a gambler, if not a thief.

Frequently Robertson would make some excuse for calling at the Malcolm mansion for some directions in regard to the work at the office; and, eventually, as he had hoped, he met the fair daughter of his employer face to face, in the presence of her father. He thus gained an introduction to Maude, which was but coldly acknowledged on her part; for she read the villain's character instantly and clearly, being scarce able to repress a shudder, as his evil eye rested on her.

Robertson had often seen Maude Malcolm in her carriage, while out for an airing, or when she accompanied her father in a drive to his office; she, however, never leaving her place in the vehicle.

On the first occasion of his having seen the young beauty and heiress, he resolved that he would gain an introduction; and then, if need be, force himself into her company, and in some way gain her good will.

He, however, upon gaining his first point, realized that Maude was entirely too clever—that she read him like a book—and this made him almost furious. In the end, he found himself in love with the young lady, although she had hardly even exchanged a word with him.

When plotting, Robertson was just in his element, and he so influenced Major Malcolm, in connection with what he was pleased to term Miss Malcolm's insulting treatment of him, that the old gentleman remonstrated with his daughter in regard to this alleged discourtesy toward his confidential clerk and friend.

Robertson was cunning enough to make his complaint immediately after the very profitable disposal of some stocks which he had advised the major to invest in.

Maude was quite indignant when thus spoken to by her father, and at once relieved her mind by disclosing her opinions very freely in regard to the, as she believed, perfidious character of the clerk; an opinion formed at first sight and strengthened at every meeting with him.

The major was disposed to be angry with his daughter, for thus, as he deemed it, traducing his trusted employee upon no grounds whatever; asserting that she could know nothing of men, or of worldly matters. But he was, ere long, destined to have startling proofs that Maude was, by far, a better judge of men than himself; especially were her assertions in regard to Robert Robertson soon to be recalled, causing deep regret that he had not listened to her, and taken her advice to discharge his trusted clerk.

Had Major Malcolm allowed any suspicion to enter his mind, through the expressed opinions of his daughter and his friends generally, in connection with Robertson, and had a watch put upon him; or even, had he inquired as to the man's character, of some detective, who, for a consideration would have shadowed him—had he done this, he would have been saved from much misery, falling upon his daughter as well as himself; besides, as will be shown, the loss of vast sums of money.

Robertson, in fact, affiliated with burglars, and thieves of lower degree; also being a confirmed gambler, having in view the swindling not only of his employer of heavy amounts, but having sworn in the depths of his cowardly soul that Maude Malcolm should be his wife.

Indeed, there was no limit to the audacity and crime of which this wretch was capable, and which he had planned.

When Major Malcolm went to New Orleans, it had been a very providential circumstance that Maude had accompanied him, as Robertson had formed a plan to not only kidnap the girl, but also to forge her father's name for large sums, cash the checks, and abscond to the far West. Of course he had an accomplice, for he could not very well, by himself, have abducted Maude.

The man whom he engaged was a criminal, who had served several short terms in various prisons, although but two years the senior of his hopeful pal, Robertson.

The name by which he was best known in police and detective circles was Sleepy Sim, this *sobriquet* having been thrust upon him on account of his peculiar drooping eyelids, which were habitually half closed. For all this, Sim was far from being sleepy, he being one of the most adroit, wide-awake and successful burglars in the city—a villain who always covered his tracks, and who had succeeded in escaping conviction a number of times, through lack of proof on the part of the State.

The absence of Major Malcolm at the Crescent City was taken advantage of by these two miscreants; for not only did they break into the major's dwelling and carry away Maude's jewelry, and a portion of the family plate, without any discovery of the loss being made in the excitement that followed the disaster upon the river, but Robertson forged and cashed checks to the amount of thirty thousand dollars—this last crime being consummated upon the same day of the departure of the major and his daughter.

The scoundrel knew that he was safe until the return of his employer; consequently he remained in the city. When he learned of the loss of the River Rover he was in perfect ecstasies of delight, believing that Major Malcolm had perished.

Should this prove to be the case, it would enable him to remain in St. Louis for some time longer, besides opening a way for him to secure more money.

When, however, he ascertained that the old major had been rescued, he was furiously incensed against the young stranger for thus stepping in and thwarting his schemes, and he instantly resolved upon revenge.

But upon reading further particulars in the morning papers, and learning that this Will Stone had also saved the major's daughter, Robertson's anger abated. He determined at once to abduct the maiden and fly with her and his ill-gotten gains.

Greatly rejoiced was the miscreant to find that the major had been wounded, and that in consequence he would be incapable of recognizing any one.

This circumstance gave him more time.

Thus it happened that Robertson, on the very night that Maude and Will had appointed to meet in the arbor to say farewell, was spying about the grounds to ascertain if the young girl, since her return, took her customary walks in the gardens; which, if so, would render the proposed abduction an easy matter, with the help of Sleepy Sim, to accomplish.

In this way he discovered the meeting between Maude and Will, learning that the youthful pair loved each other, but that Will, not having sufficient pecuniary means to find favor with the old gentleman, had resolved to set out forthwith for the mines of New Mexico.

The skulking villain could hardly control his fury, his jealous and murderous rage; and he vowed mentally that he would follow the young man to the West, and take his life.

There were two things more, that Robertson learned, while lurking in the arbor.

First that it would not be necessary to abduct Maude, for she was solemnly pledged to Will Stone, and would not marry during his absence.

Secondly, that there was every chance for a man who had sufficient money, as far as Major Malcolm was concerned, to gain the daughter. With the aid of Sleepy Sim, much could be accomplished in the mines.

They could, together, raise a band of outlaws, and rob the stages. Not only this, but he could lure his victims to the mines.

He would disguise his hand-writing, and as a volunteer adviser, tempt the major to New Mexico; and then rob him, forcing him also to send for more money.

This project gave birth to another.

He would, while gaining wealth which would place him as nearly equal to his employer as was possible, favor that end by reducing the wealth of the latter.

Through her father, or Will Stone, he could induce Maude to start for New Mexico. He could there attack the stage she was in, and secure her.

Great projects were born in the dastard's mind, as he hastened to gain a view of the face of our hero, after having hissed those dread threats in the ear of Maude Malcolm, leaving her senseless in the arbor.

Had not the new, and far safer and more reasonable plots been formed, the villain would, without doubt, have clutched the maiden then and there, and carried her off.

Thus it will be seen, that Major Malcolm had, so to speak, warmed a serpent in his bosom, and it was now coiling, ready to spring; a serpent that would inclose him in strong folds, crushing out gradually his hope and happiness, by wrenching from him his idols—his precious gold, and his angelic daughter—the same reptile all the while, dragging its slimy length along the trail of Will Stone, bent upon striking its fangs into his heart!

From having taken passage on the River Rover, our young friend was fated to realize that he had become involved in a web of most amazing life-lines, which would not only change his whole aims and hopes in life, but would almost suffocate him.

Would he escape the sharp sting, the poisonous fang of this hideous tarantula?

We shall see.

CHAPTER VI.

BUILT IN A DAY.

BOWLDER CITY was a new "strike," at the time of which we write.

It was situated in the northern portion of New Mexico, in fact within a few hours' ride by stage from the Colorado line, and in the wildest portion of the backbone of the American continent, to wit, the Rocky Mountains.

The "city" had, as usual, been "slapped up" in the most hasty manner, by the first "rush" that had followed the discovery of gold quartz croppings in the huge gulches, as well as the finer dust in the sands of the gullies and small mountain streams. There were good advantages for "wash;" and, from this fact, as gold could be "panned," the "find" caused considerable excitement up and down the range, among the impecunious roving masses of the mining districts—the rougher portion, who, with but the small outlay for pick, pan, shovel, and a few pounds of bacon and corn-meal, could make a start in business; erecting a hut of branches, or a "wicky-up" on the south side of some boulder, or in a rocky crevasse, for a home.

In consequence, Bowlder City and its suburbs were principally populated by a rough and reckless lot of miners—as much so as could be found on the range, north or south.

The usual speculators, wandering merchants, traders, and whisky-venders, together with men who had large capital at command, and who were acting as agents for well-known mining-companies, were on hand, ready to take advantage of all the gold "panned," or to buy any paying claims that might be "struck" in the vicinity.

These were the real builders of the burg, with a few exceptions; these last consisting of the better "fixed" knights of the pan, and prospectors for quartz, or pocket-gold.

The town was simply two parallel rows of slab shanties, having both peaked and flat roofs, and with a rough street between, which was used by but few wheeled vehicles except the stages on the branch line, started from a station on the down-range route, some twelve or fifteen miles east of the town.

The stage trail wound over a ridge to the north of the burg, and down a gentle decline into the street; the ground being hard and smooth, not having had any ruts formed by even the heavily-loaded wagons of the merchant and freight trains. The end of the street was the terminus of the trail also; for there the cedar and cacti-dotted side of the rocky range stopped further progress, towering high toward the clouds—a mighty gorge, that seemed as if the range had been rent by the thunderbolts of Jove.

The mountain-side was cracked and seamed in every direction, having gaping caverns, and huge boulders; the latter looking as if a touch from an infant's hand could topple them, thundering down the mountain-side. There, in scattered confusion, lay hundreds more, that had been displaced by the lightnings, or the terrific winds.

Bowlder Hotel was a much more extensive building than any in the burg, it being some sixty feet by twenty, and the attic being partitioned off into sleeping apartments, by stretching cotton cloth from rafter to floor.

Next to the entrance was the bar, constructed of long planed slabs, with shelves behind for bottles and show decanters. A large gilt framed mirror occupied the center, in strong contrast to the rough slabs which formed the sides of the building, and the general appointments of the same.

The bar was fifteen feet in length, with a bench on the opposite wall of the room, for the accommodation of the patrons; and the space beyond it, extending to the rear of the building, was devoted to the devotees of the "pasteboards." Tables and chairs of the commonest kind, and unpainted, were standing around in confusion; while a roulette and three faro-tables stood near the walls.

This establishment was on the east side of the street, and directly opposite was another of nearly the same size; but this last was flat-roofed, and had therefore no rooms for lodgers. It had been named, very appropriately—in the

first part of the designation, at least—"Booze Bazaar."

The proprietor of this hostelry was a tall, slab-sided—to use his own expression—Texan, with long, neglected hair, and a pointed spare goatee, which had become thus from the habit of its happy possessor of drawing it quite frequently through his hand. This was invariably accompanied by a jerk downward, which drew in the same direction his lower jaw, when he ejected a squirt of tobacco juice; a by no means unfrequent occurrence, as he kept a prodigious quid between his teeth, and worked his jaws as regular as the crunch of a quartz mill while in operation.

He asserted that he was a "Llano Long Horn"—Rio Llano, Texas—and that he had "ranched hit ever since he war hatched;" and, as his language and manner testified to this pretty strongly, it had never been openly disputed.

His real name was unknown, for he had been dubbed "Long Horn," from the day that he "opened up" in Boulder City; and this *sobriquet* was terribly appropriate, as he was pretty longitundinous. Indeed, when stretched out for a snooze on the bar-bench, he was a rare sight—a genuine specimen of the Long Horn State, as Texas is frequently termed.

Long Horn was a snap-shot with a revolver, expert with a bowie-knife, and, to use his own slang, "could give paces, an' slack noose ter any Greaser, when hit come ter slingin' raw-hide;" by which he meant a lasso.

One of these weapons—they may well be called such—long, slender, strong, and well greased, Long Horn kept hanging behind his bar; and, when overloaded with his fluids, or on an occasion when there was any "unpleasantness" among his patrons, which promised to leave a "stiff" or two on his premises, thus giving him the trouble and expense of having it removed and buried, he used his lasso to advantage, backed by his deadly "six" and bowie, which were never absent from his belt.

His competitor, the proprietor of Boulder Hotel, was a fat, good-natured German, whose fondness for pretzels, when he could procure these delicacies from Denver, the enormous number he could stow away, together with his stereotyped expression after enjoying a feast—namely, "Dot bretzels vos goot. Dey makes me pig"—had been the means of saddling him with the name of "Pig Pretzel," a cognomen which was far more appropriate, and much easier to pronounce than the one he had received at his christening, "over der prine, on der Rhine."

Pig Pretzel was a great "blow," or boaster; frequently repeating in a bloodthirsty manner, the original and unique expressions of the rough miners, who, when full of "bug juice," and on the war-path, filled the room with their boasting war-songs, of prowess, skill and past deeds.

Every one knew that Pig Pretzel would run in terror, as fast as his short legs could carry him, should a jack-rabbit spring up in his path; consequently the boys frequently "put up jobs" on Pig, being on the alert for a "fresh" continually, whom they would let into the secret of the landlord's character, and get him to demand satisfaction of the latter, for some fancied affront, at the point of a "tube" or "hasher."

Pig invariably made a point of blustering and blowing, endeavoring to frighten every "fresh" who did not sling gold over his bar often enough to suit him.

The stage driver, in charge of the one six-horse Concord coach, on the branch-line into Boulder City, was known as "Rattling Rob," from the fact that he never "kicked brakes" when starting down the decline; but, with yells and cracking whip, dashed down into the burg, the horses at a gallop, and the wheels rattling over the rocky road.

As yet there had been no sheriff elected; in fact, no town officers whatever; and no lawyers or "land sharks" had put in an appearance.

Neither had there been any vigilance committee organized, as all the shooting thus far, had been "on the square." The town had not been in existence long enough for the lawless population to get down to business, or for either road-agents or mountain bandits to trouble it.

However, the prospects were good for flush times ahead, and then all these little differences in a "slam-up" burg, would, without doubt, be made good.

Indeed, the day was not far distant, when Boulder City would hold its own with any mountain mining-town, in the way of "amusements," peculiar to the class of people who form the bulk of the population of such burgs.

Those, in fact, who have thus far occupied prominent positions in our narrative, were destined to be drawn to Boulder City—the town and its vicinity being fated to be the field of operations, the scene of great anguish, danger, and torture of mind and body.

Boulder City was "slapped up" about the same time that the ill-starred River Rover, a mass of seething flames, sunk with her dead and dying passengers beneath the waters of the Mississippi.

Having thus partially described the place, its

prospects, and the character of its denizens, amid which our friends and their enemies are to be drawn—although they dreamed not of the existence of the mushroom town at the foot of the Rockies—we will at once plunge into the continuation of our story.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BAG-SLASHERS.

BUT a couple of miles up the range from Boulder City was a huge gorge, of nearly the same dimensions of that of which we have already spoken. Into this the sun never shone, except for about two hours in the early morning. It was most forbidding in appearance, and few men would be apt to traverse its entire length, even though they might be the most eager mineral prospectors.

Few would have dreamed that this gorge was the retreat, or led to the retreat of a party of human beings; yet such was the case.

About a month after the loss of the River Rover, had one been at the entrance of the gorge, a strange and impressive sight would have been seen; which, had the citizens of the burg witnessed, they would have known that they were honored by the arrival of a gang of bandits in their near vicinity.

It was a moonlight night, when full a score of horsemen, all armed to the teeth, and wearing masks, rode slowly into the mouth of the huge mountain chasm.

Ahead of them, mounted upon a mule, was an Indian, evidently acting as guide.

In the lead of the men was a rider, who, from his rich costume, seemed to be the chief of the band. His attire was gay, and profusely ornamented with silver buttons. He wore a wide-brimmed sombrero of black felt, and his hair was long and coarse, being of the same hue, as was also the magnificent horse upon which he rode.

This last was a picture well worth looking upon, and the rider sat gracefully, as if well used to the saddle. In form, the man was slender, but wiry, and quick of motion, as could be seen when he turned, as he frequently did, in the saddle.

Not a word was spoken.

Keeping his eyes upon the black void ahead, and never once looking behind him, the Indian guide slowly proceeded, and, one by one, all disappeared in the darkness. But an eye that was accustomed to night travel, might have distinguished the outlines of their forms, as they moved, slowly and weirdly, toward the head of the gulch.

At length the Indian halted, until the bandit chief reached his side, when the savage spoke:

"Red Eagle say bring white chief to big hole in rocks. Red Eagle tongue straight. He is here. Come! Heap dark. It is good."

"Good for you, Red Eagle; it is indeed; you shall receive your reward. I see no sign of our boys here, but, for that matter, a fellow can see nothing."

"If you have a hole here, slide into it; but, I swear, no one else could discover it. Go ahead! Boys, follow close after, or you'll miss the spot!"

Around to the west side of a *motte* in front of them, rode the Indian, when he turned abruptly to his right, and entered a narrow arched passage, along which but one horseman could proceed at a time. This passage wound, in a serpentine manner, for a long distance, when suddenly a grayish light appeared, which brightened as they went on; and soon the chief uttered an exclamation of intense amazement, mingled with relief and gratification.

Soon he emerged into the bright moonlight, and, in a little time, his followers were with him, having halted in astonishment.

Spread out before them, was a mount-inclosed valley of some ten acres in extent, covered with a carpet of rich rank grass, with here and there a *motte* of pines; while a small pond of water lay, like a sheet of silver, at the base of the shelving mountain walls of the fairy vale.

It was a strange and beautiful sight.

There appeared to be no entrance to this oasis in the mountains, except through the arched rock passage which they had followed; this seeming to have been hewed through the base of the mountain by the hand of man, for the express purpose of gaining an entrance to the valley. So surprised, and agreeably so, were the outlaws, that their eyes had been fastened upon the view in their front; but a joyous yell, to their right, drew the attention of all, and they beheld a huge fire, near which were two villainous-looking armed men, who cried out:

"Hurrah fer yeon, boyees! Dog gonad glad Red Eagle brought yer in all hunk, fer we-uns hev bin ormighly lonesome—yer kin jist gamble on thet!"

"How-dy, cap'n,"—this was said to the leader of the band, with an off-hand gesture of welcome—"don't reckon yer c'u'd ha' found sich a snug locate es this hyer, ef yer'd ha' hunted a month of Sundays."

"How are you, Big Buck?" returned the chief, heartily. "You are right in all you say."

This is just the locate for our nags. It is just the place we want in every way—so easy to defend. One man can guard the whole business. But, where's the cave, Buck? We're half-starved. Got any provender?"

"Fresh b'ar meat ontill yer can't rest, 'sides bacon, corn-pone, an' coffee," was the reply. "Ther cave air O. K., an' fixed up gay. I tell yer, boy-es, we-uns orter give Red Eagle his weight in ora fer this find."

While the outlaws had been admiring the scene before them, the Indian had turned his mule and disappeared in the dark passage which led to the gulch.

In five minutes more the entire band were seated on their saddles, eating voraciously of the food placed before them by a wretched-looking pigmy of a man, ape-like in appearance, with a most murderous face and small, black eyes.

He was known as Monkey Mose.

This was one of the two men whom Red Eagle had led a week previous to this retreat, for the purpose of fitting up the cave in anticipation of the coming of the bandits to take possession.

The half-famished outlaws were too busy satisfying their hunger to converse, but Big Buck broke the silence, in a voice of surprise:

"Whar in ther devil's thet red gone, cap'n?"

"He's rode back to guide the pack-mules in. We were in too much of a hurry to lag along at a slow pace with them."

"Thet's all O. K. then. Red Eagle 'pears ter be purty squar', but I never did trust a 'Pache."

"He's a renegade from his tribe," said the captain; "and he will stick to us, because it is almost a necessity for him. I struck him up-range, a most miserable, half-starved being, and I fixed him up."

"It's lucky I did, or we would never have known of this secret retreat. Can you see the Boulder City stage from the top of the mountain, Buck?"

"Dang me, ef yer can't see all New Mex', Col'rado, an' nigh ter Frisco!" was the reply. "Ya-as, cap'n, yer kin see ther hearse afore she gits fur from ther station, an' she orter be yankin' gold in an' out by this time. Ther burg air a rouser."

"Thar's a heap o' dust bein' panned out, an' spec'lators comin' in. I sh'u'dn't wonder ef thar'd be a quartz-mill er two thar within a week. Ther rocks air rich, I tell yer, an' thar's good pickin's fer we-uns ahead. Thar orter be one er two of our crowd inside ther burg ter git p'int's o' how things runs."

"I'll attend to that to-morrow. Reckon I'll ride in myself. I'm fresh here, and I intend to run things heavy to win. Got private biz there too. But show us the cave, Buck, if the boys have got through eating."

"All hunk, cap'n! Strike out or up," was the cry of many.

And led by Big Buck, who was a gigantic and most ruffianly-visaged man, all started toward the east side of the valley to the base of the mountain.

Up a winding, rocky shelf, quite steep in many places, the band proceeded, until they actually panted from fatigue; but Big Buck only laughed, saying:

"Yer'll git used ter ther trail, boyees. I'll sw'ar hit made me wilt, fu'st off, but I doesn't mind hit now a bit. But hyer we air all hunk. This air ther futur' home o' Black Bob's Bag-Slashers!"

Wild cheers rung from the outlaws, at the concluding words of Big Buck, in spite of their excessive fatigue; and all darted into a clump of cedars, which concealed a huge arched passage, that extended into the side of the mountain.

Brightly burning torches of pine knots illuminated this passage, these being thrust into cracks in the walls, which had the appearance of being set thickly with brilliant diamonds; the mica in the rocks reflecting the light of the torches. All strode on, when, about ten yards from the entrance, they came to an immense hall, with dome-like roof, which was some fifty feet above their heads.

A hundred men could have occupied this vast apartment, without incommencing each other.

Rough tables, benches, and bunks, were to be seen on all sides; and arched passages led from the vast hall, evidently to other cave chambers.

Exclamations of wonder and pleasure burst from even these lawless men at the grand and magnificent sight.

"Hyar we air, Cap, an' boyees," said Buck; "an' hit's 'bout es purty an' snug a lay-off place es yer kin find in ther bull Rockies, I sw'ar! Thar's yer hole, Cap,"—pointing to a narrow passage—"an', arter ther mules gits hyer, I'll hev Monkey Mose fix it up a leetle more comfort'ble. We hes did ther best wi' what we hed."

"You have done bully, Buck! This is a natural palace, and a thousand men could not out us!"

"I kin lead yer from hyer plum out ter ther gulch wall, an' down inter hit, ef hit's needes-sary, cap'n," asserted Big Buck.

"The deuce you can! Then we have two entrances—one from the gulch, and the other from the valley?"

"That's the solid truth! I tell yer Cap'n Black Bob, yer Bag-Slashers air fixed fine hyer, ye kin jist bet!"

"You're right, Buck! Now, I'll inspect my quarters. Assign the boys to their bunks, and let every one follow his own inclinations. There are cards, whisky; canned goods, and blankets, on the pack-mules; and they will soon be here, I reckon."

A rousing cheer rung, and echoed through the vaulted caverns.

The chief entered the passage that had been pointed out by Big Buck, and found himself in a smaller cave-chamber, which was illuminated, and furnished with a table, chairs, and a rudely constructed couch, that was spread with the skins of wild animals.

Then Black Bob tore off his mask, and threw it upon the table with evident relief, as he sunk into a chair.

His face, now disclosed, showed the villainous features, and snake-like eyes of the same miscreant, whom we have seen as a lurking spy, lying among the vines of the arbor at Major Malcolm's in St. Louis, during the parting interview between Maude and Will.

It was Robertson, the forger, the thief, the confidential clerk of the major, and who had sworn to ruin both father and daughter, and to hunt Will Stone to the death!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL.

WHEN Maude Malcolm recovered her senses, after the departure of Will Stone, and the fright that followed, her brain was in a wild whirl. She could have borne the parting with more fortitude and hope, had not her senses been to a certain extent demoralized, by the terrible and startling scenes through which she had passed, and the effect which they had upon her nervous system.

Only a moment or two, however, passed after the maiden recovered when she recalled the immediate cause of her having fainted.

She had been terrified by the fearful threat that had been hissed into her ear.

Some spy, some one who—although she had not seen him—caused a repulsive feeling that sickened her, had overheard the parting words of herself and Will. But who was it?

The voice was, in intonation, although so low and constrained by passion, somewhat familiar.

It could be no enemy of Will's, for he had never before visited the city; and the young girl was unwilling to believe that her lover could have an enemy in the world.

His enmity must have been caused by what he had seen and heard.

His voice expressed the most malignant jealousy.

Who could he be?

At this moment, the watch-dog walked lazily up to her, wagging his tail. This directed Maude's mind into a new channel.

She knew well that, had the lurker been a stranger, the dog would have given an alarm.

Outside of the household servants, there was but one person, who could have thus been on the grounds, unnoticed by Nero. This person was in her father's confidence, but he was a man whom she detested, whom she believed to be a villain, and capable of any crime.

One moment's reasoning convinced Maude Malcolm that the spy was Robertson.

She knew that her father's clerk had no end of assurance. He was just the kind of sneaking scoundrel, who was likely to develop into a cowardly assassin.

Such miscreants were to be feared by the very bravest of men.

If this Robertson had not had views and aims in connection with herself, he would not have cared a fig in regard to Will's having appeared as her declared lover. This was plain, and Maude shuddered at the thought.

Reaching her apartment, the poor girl cast herself upon her couch and sobbed herself to sleep. Upon awaking, all her fears returned; and after breakfast she went at once to the house of the friend in whose care she had desired Will to address his letters. Her joy may be imagined when she found already, from Will, a letter awaiting her. It had been written that morning, and the envelope contained, also, a fine picture of the writer.

The letter itself was brief, and ran as follows:

"MY OWN DARLING MAUDE:—

"Inclosed find my photograph, to insure you against forgetting the general outline of my handsome physiognomy. In twenty minutes more I shall be on the cars, speeding westward. I go at once to Denver, and thence to the latest discovered mines.

"Will write you soon. Write me at Fountain City, Colorado. I shall go down the range, perhaps as far as New Mexico, if I see nothing favorable in Colorado. Do not worry a moment on my account. I can take care of myself, and am strong in hope, determined to win.

"Be of good cheer, my darling, and keep the roses on your fair cheeks. God bless and protect you!

"Yours until death,

"WILLIAM W. STONE."

As may be supposed, Maude returned home with a lighter heart.

She felt that the miscreant would not have an opportunity to assassinate Will in the crowded streets in broad daylight. Will was safe on the train, but fast speeding away from her.

After a day or two Maude became more composed in mind, and hopeful. She believed that Will was capable of accomplishing any object, and therefore all would be well in time.

Little thought the poor girl how her faith and her very soul would be tried in the days not far distant. Well was it that she did not.

Major Malcolm recovered rapidly. On the third day after the departure of Will Stone, he sent for Robertson, thinking it strange that the latter had not called upon him in his illness. The messenger returned with the startling intelligence that the confidential clerk had not been seen within the last two days; and that the office was closed.

The ex-planter was dumfounded.

Maude was in her father's room when the messenger reported, and she nearly fell to the floor in a faint.

She knew, as well as if she had herself followed him to the depot, that Robertson had gone in pursuit of Will, and that if opportunity offered he would keep his vow and assassinate him. This was terrible.

Pale as death, the maiden sunk into a chair. Major Malcolm was equally startled—so much so that he gasped for breath. The truth at once flashed upon his mind—all the warnings he had received against trusting such a man.

All the strong faith he had felt in his clerk vanished on the instant. He was confident that Robertson had absconded and that he had abused his trust. For some minutes he sat in his reclining chair, dazed by the startling announcement; then he actually shrieked for his carriage and frantically prepared himself for the street.

He paid no attention to his daughter, and she felt greatly relieved that he did not.

The fear of the old man was that his daughter would recall the warnings she had given him, and he could not but think it strange that she remained silent. The truth was that Maude was too overcome with apprehension to speak. She feared, too, lest she might betray her emotions. She well knew what would be the question of her father in such a case.

Why should she be thus affected at the disappearance of his clerk?

Major Malcolm was assisted into his carriage, and gave orders to be driven, with all haste, to his office. He had a duplicate key, and upon his arrival has helped inside.

Upon the desk lay a letter, addressed to himself, in the hand-writing of his clerk.

As he grasped it, a ray of hope flashed upon him. This, however, was soon transformed to frantic fury, as he tore open the envelope and glanced over the epistle.

It was, indeed, sufficiently exasperating.

The letter ran as follows:

"MAJOR MUNROE MALCOLM:—

"DIS-RESPECTED SIR:—I have had the honor of being your confidential clerk for a sufficient length of time to effect my purpose. I gained your confidence by an extraordinary run of luck in selecting stocks at hap-hazard for you to purchase. You were warned that I was an infernal rascal, yet you kept me in your employ.

"Before we proceed further allow me to state that I have hypothecated bonds of yours on various occasions, and I have this day taken the liberty of drawing on your bankers for a cool thirty thousand. As you were particularly engaged I copied your 'sig.' in a manner to surprise you when you see it.

"I'm off for gay Paris, but I shall return, for I am not done with you. Your daughter had the audacity to betray her dislike, in fact her strong repugnance for me, after I had condescendingly permitted myself to admire her. She also read me like a book, as far as character and intention went, and I vowed that I would be revenged on her and you. This is but the commencement.

"No thanks expected for giving you fair warning. You will see me when you are least expecting it. My soft-headed old snoozer, I bid you good-by for the present.

"Confidentially yours,

"R. ROBERTSON (so called).

"N. B.—Aristocratic name, but intend to sail under a fresh one."

Major Malcolm sat, with his eyes fastened upon these lines, his mouth open, and his breath coming and going in short gasps. Then, as he mastered the contents, he gave out a deep groan of anguish, and fell to the floor.

Brought back to his home, Dr. Bigelow was again called in. He was quite indignant that his patient had been permitted to leave his room; but the explanations given convinced him that, even had he been there himself, he could not have prevented this.

The letter had been brought from the office to Maude, who gave it to the physician to read. At once, he saw that he must allay that young lady's suspicions. The epistle indicated that the villain had designs on her, and the doctor sought to banish her fears, in every possible way.

He asserted that, after committing such an extensive forgery, Robertson would not dare to remain in America, as he could be easily de-

tected. He had, without doubt, left for New York, en route for Europe.

Major Malcolm recovered, but the loss of so much money wore greatly upon his mind, causing him to feel that he was a ruined man.

He would not even go to the expense of setting detectives on the track of his perfidious clerk, but only sought to make up, in speculations, for the losses sustained through him.

Weeks passed, and Maude was twice rejoiced beyond measure by receiving letters from Will Stone; the last of which stated that he had decided to go to a new mining-town in Northern New Mexico, called Boulder City, where he hoped to hear from her. He was well, and acknowledged the receipt of Robertson's farewell missive, which Maude had inclosed to him, and he bade the young girl not to be disturbed by the threats which the dastardly thief had made.

Nothing further of any importance occurred at the Malcolm mansion, until some weeks later, when the major received a letter, written by—as he believed—an old friend, who had gone to the Far West some years previous. He read this to his daughter, with equal joy and satisfaction. He seemed as pleased as a school boy at the commencement of vacation.

The surprise of Maude may be imagined, when she saw that the communication had been mailed at Fountain City, Colorado; the writer speaking also of Boulder City, New Mexico.

In regard to its contents, we will merely say, that the major's old friend insisted upon his meeting him as soon as possible, at Boulder City, bringing with him ten thousand dollars, for the purpose of entering into a partnership with the writer, in a mining speculation, which would clear them a hundred thousand within six months. Thus it read, and the old gentleman was wild with joy.

Of course he would go, and at once.

Nothing that Maude could say against this proposal had any weight with her father.

He would not remain long away.

He would leave her in an elegant home, with servants and friends around her, and she would not need him.

He would return rich.

Thus the major reasoned, not remembering the fact that he had, already, more money than he knew how to take care of. Finally his daughter gave up all hope of inducing him to remain at home.

It was some consolation to know that he was going to the same town at which Will would be. They would be sure to meet, but her father would not know him.

But Will would watch over, and protect him.

Immediately the young girl wrote her lover, informing him that her father was about to start for Boulder City, and also the occasion of this move on his part.

Major Malcolm, after giving his daughter full power to draw on his bankers for any amount, took an affectionate farewell of her, and set out for Boulder City via Denver, with the required ten thousand dollars in greenbacks and government bonds; speeding over the iron rails and tedious stage routes, to convey this amount to Richard Robertson—or Robert Rich, as he now claimed to be—but known in New Mexico as Black Bob, the chief of the Bag-Slashers.

He it was, knowing of the major's old friend, who had forged the decoy letter.

CHAPTER IX.

RECKONING WITHOUT THEIR HOST.

THE Bag Slashers had every reason to congratulate themselves after the arrival of mules with abundance of stores of every description. The cave being transformed into quarters that were much better, in point of comfort, than any government barracks. They were at such an altitude that the rocks and air were dry and agreeable, a circulation from the gulch entrance to the arched opening above the little valley being available at any time they wished, by merely removing a curtain of double blankets from the smaller opening above the huge chasm, which was seemingly hidden from view below by a clump of dwarf pines.

Black Bob, as we must now call Robertson, the forger—he having also assumed the name of Robert Rich—had started westward on the evening of the same day on which Will Stone had taken the train; the miscreant having formed, after he had gained a view of the young man's face by the light of the street lamp in St. Louis, a plot which in his way of reasoning would place him in a position to glut his revenge in a much more satisfactory manner than to assassinate his hated rival, or bribe some one to do it.

Supplying Sleepy Sim with funds, Robertson gave him an outline of his plot, a portion of which was to be carried out by Sim before he joined him in the West. A correspondence was to be kept up between these two worthies, the duty of the lesser villain being to act as spy around the Malcolm mansion and inform his employer of every important occurrence; especially the departure of the major, and afterward that of his daughter, for New Mexico.

Bob assured Sim of his power to lure them into the web he was spinning, a web which was

also to inclose Will Stone in its folds, besides being the means of placing a fortune in the hands of the plotters.

With full and explicit directions to his pal, the fugitive forger started on the trail of his rival; and it was through his influence that the young man was induced, or advised, to go to Boulder City, the perfidious villain bribing men to speak of the rich "strike" there, in the hearing of Will on a number of occasions. He himself kept in the background, not once allowing Will to see him, as he feared a possible recognition, on the young man's part.

The villain found he had no common man to deal with, and hence his caution.

One glance at Will had decided Black Bob that the former was a lion in strength and bravery, and agile as a panther, in fact, that he would be a dangerous man to tackle, especially when aroused. It would not do to put him on his guard, by creating a suspicion, which might be awakened, did he but allow his intended victim to see his face.

Black Bob, however, followed Will, succeeding in his purpose of inducing him, through others, to proceed down the rocky range.

Then the miscreant continued on, and having ample means, succeeded in collecting a band of outlaws, whom he equipped in the most efficient manner; and, by traveling nights, by the wildest and most deserted routes, arrived, as we have seen, at the cavern and valley.

On the day following, Black Bob, with two of his followers, disguised as rough miners, entered the town on pack-mules with well-worn saddles and a meager outfit. The chief, leaving his two men to act as spies, to his great joy received a letter from Sleepy Sim—the mail for Boulder City being brought by stage from the nearest post-office, the burg having none as yet. The letter stated that Major Malcolm had left St. Louis for the West.

An expression of the most fiendish exultation was stamped upon Bob's face, as he perused this epistle.

He also ascertained that Will Stone had arrived that very afternoon in Boulder City, and he resolved to pay a visit to the burg that evening, that he might, if possible, get a view of his intended victim.

Thus far his plot had worked well.

His victims were, like flies, becoming entangled in his web; and he intended "bleeding" them, torturing them to the very soul, before the last grand closing act, which should end the lives of two, and force the third—the fair Maude—to become his cringing slave.

Hastening back to the cave, under cover of night, Black Bob dispatched one of his men up the range, to a station, where the stage stopped for refreshments; there to remain until the major arrived, a full description of the latter being given the spy, when he was to ride at full speed to the cave, and inform his chief.

As Black Bob was lavish with his gold, and had procured everything for their comfort, his followers were perfectly contented to remain inactive at their rocky retreat, until, as he proposed, the citizens of the burg should be dumfounded when they realized for the first time, that a strong and well-organized band of road-agents was near them, and deep in business.

In short, Black Bob was looked upon as a model leader.

Everything was lovely at the cave.

The chief knew, however, that this state of things would not last. The men would not long be contented to remain inactive.

Black Bob was a coward at heart, but from association with the lawless mountaineers he had become reckless, and assumed daring and brave airs. But all this was superficial.

He had sworn to have both gold and revenge.

A portion of the latter should be gained by depriving his intended victims of their wealth.

He did not wish to risk his life to any extent beyond the carrying out of his plot; and this seemed easy of accomplishment, now that Will Stone was in Boulder City, and Major Malcolm was on his way thither.

Maude Malcolm must come also.

Everything was working favorably to the end he had in view.

Will Stone had taken the advantage of gaining the best advice from every prospector and practical mineralogist during his travels. He had thus gained much valuable information, and also from books treating of this subject, which he had purchased at Denver.

Therefore, he being of more than ordinary intelligence and perception, was not liable to become the victim of swindlers. No one would stand a chance to sell him a "salted" claim.

His bearing, gentlemanly conduct, and handsome face, together with his commanding, muscular appearance and build, caused him to be favorably received by most of the mining people.

He had adopted the costume of the region.

He had, from necessity, become expert in the use of his revolvers.

He had purchased a noble black horse and the finest equipments.

Consequently, when he arrived thus in Boulder City, he made no little sensation.

There was, however, one border accomplishment which he had not and did not intend to acquire.

This was tipping a glass of whisky skyward and allowing the vile poison to run down his throat, to the derangement of his brain and stomach.

Now, a man who did not pour down "bug-juice" was considered by the majority of the Boulder citizens, or indeed by any others on that range, no man at all. From this fact Will Stone was destined to get into trouble, although such was far from being his desire.

Upon our young friend's arrival, he staked his horse, after giving the animal a feed of corn, registered at the Boulder Hotel as William Stone, and requested to be shown his room, as he wished to write a letter.

Without noticing the surly looks of those around him, especially of "Pig Pretzel," the proprietor—all of whom were indignant at the stranger's not having "set 'em up," as was customary with new-comers—noticing not this, with a general polite salutation, which somewhat mollified them, the young man repaired to his room for the purpose of writing Maude.

It was now evening, and the denizens of the burg had not as yet got livened up to the usual enjoyment of the hour.

The town was in a highly prosperous condition, but the prosperous portion of the population had not as yet found their way to their usual resorts.

A graveyard had long since been started, with due celebration, and numerous "stiffs," without pulling their boots off, had been planted. This latter ceremony had, in some instances, been avoided, for the reason that various reptiles were supposed to have taken up their quarters within the aforesaid foot-coverings, the wearers having succumbed to a terrific attack of "jim-jams."

Perhaps, if the grave-diggers and those who made up the mourners on these occasions, had not been afflicted with symptoms of the same disease, the "stiffs" would have prepared in a more Christian-like way for their last long sleep.

In another chapter we shall see how our friend Will introduced himself to the citizens of the burg, in which, should everything prove favorable, he proposed to locate.

In spite of considerable experience along the range, he was destined to realize that the denizens of Boulder City were, to say the least, peculiar and original beyond the average.

No sooner had Will left the bar for the upper portion of the building than the range bummers and "down-to-bed-rock" miners, resolved to put up a job on him upon his reappearance in the bar.

They had been grossly insulted, and if he was as big as a mountain, they swore to "blow him sky-high," make him "take water," apologize, and furnish free "bug-juice" for all during the night. And they meant it.

Pig Pretzel was at the head of the plot, as it was his interest to be.

He felt sure that the stranger had ducats, and he wanted to finger the same.

Meanwhile Will was writing his letter, informing Maude Malcolm of his arrival.

CHAPTER X.

A PUT DOWN JOB.

To the surprise of the range bummers, after the departure of Will to his room, Pig Pretzel, with as much alacrity as his laziness would allow, set out a long line of bottles and glasses, and beckoned to the eager crowd to come forward.

They could hardly believe their senses.

Yet not an instant did they hesitate.

"Rah fer Pig Pretzel!"

"Hunky boyee, Dutchy!"

"Wa-al, I swar! Hyer's a hefty surprise-party!"

"Reckon thar's a cyclone comin'!"

Such cries rung through Boulder Hotel; the landlord, his expression betraying that he had some project in his brain, seeming quite unconscious of them.

Finally, Pig poured out a glass, but allowed it to remain on the bar, while his eyes ran along the line of delectable humans in front of him.

"Sbentlemens," he said, at length; "vot you dinks 'pout Pig Pretzel up dem set pottles fer nodings! You dinks dot nex' stor-rum rains pug-juice! Vell, I should cough up mine pier. Ve must haf von cirgus mit dot bilgrim vot shust goes mit his room, don't it? Dot's vot I wants."

"Ve vill git varumed up a leedle pefore he down comes. Den he vill see vot kind of beebles vos in Powlter Zity, py Shiminy Yawcobs! He vos too fresh to coom mit mine bowus, and go straight drew mine par, und not dreat de growd."

"Py tam, I vos mat! Voop her up! You hears me, Pig Pretzel? I vos tangerous mans ven I gits goot mat already!"

"Rah fer Pig Pretzel!"

"Sot 'em up ag'in, boss!"

"Yer hear us howl, Pig! We're with yer, ontill ther fresh melts inter his butes!"

"We're sand clean through, an' we'll make ther high-toned cuss scratch gravel lively!"

Thus one after another yelled.

"Vait a vile, poyees, und I dells you somedings. Ef I vos not veel purdy goot 'pout some dings, I vould gut dot rooster's spurs mineself, fer I veels like gottin' mine Deutch mat up."

"Put I leafs it mit you, poyes. Dot's all vot I says already. Now, spiel on mit dot Gopenhagen waltz! Vot you all dakes ag'in?"

Every man among his audience knew that the landlord was a contemptible coward, but they cared not to betray the slightest sign of merriment at his boastings, lest they might lose the much longed for liquid refreshments, which all knew would be forthcoming, did they but flatter their host, by appearing to believe that he was the terror he assumed to be.

All were confident that Pig Pretzel had a very heavy load of liquor on board, or he would not be so liberal; hence the room rung with wild hurrahs for the landlord of the Boulder Hotel.

The drinks were again gotten away with in a very short time, and then all manifested the greatest curiosity, as they leaned upon the bar, and gazed expectantly at Pig Pretzel.

"Spit her out, boss."

"Warble yer song, Pretzel!"

"Gi'n hit tew us lively, fer we're bankerin' ter hear what's up!"

Pig Pretzel held up both hands, palms outward, in an expostulatory manner, as these demands were yelled at him; his face expressing the fact that he considered the revelation he proposed to make, of the utmost importance.

Silence followed. Then he said, with a very impressive voice and manner:

"Holt on mit dot shin music, poyees, und I dells you vot makes me veel like tancing dot Gopenhagen waltz. Don't you knows dot stage gooms in de mornin's?"

"Ya-as—but what of bit? Spit her out!" said one of the bummers, impatiently.

Pig leaned back against the partition, and laughed loudly, shaking from head to foot.

This was tantalizing to the impatient men, whose brains were inflamed with whisky. Only a moment, however, did the landlord pause to give vent to his mirth, for he realized that his audience were not in a mood to be trifled with.

"Vell, poyees, I dells you. On dot stage vos gomes from Tenver, swei pig kegs pier, und—" sweeping along the line of eager listeners, a joyous light in his eyes, the landlord hesitated an instant. Then he leaped into the air with a yell—"und von pig parrel of dem pretzels!"

The yells and stamping of boots that filled the bar at this, were simply terrific; and they closed amid universal peals of boisterous laughter. The cause of this was, that all were well aware that the landlord invariably got on a spree when beer and pretzels arrived, and was quite liberal during his celebration of the event; being correspondingly morose and stingy when these prized luxuries had been exhausted.

"Gott in Himmel!" exclaimed Pig, gesticulating wildly; "you sca's dot bilgrim, und he gooms not down to-night, already, und we lose dot cirgus. Go und blay gards, now. You can raise hundred t'ousan' tyfils ven he gooms down."

"Slide out some more p'ison, pard, an' ther we-uns 'll raise a merry Tophet. Reckon he won't linger up thar long arter we-uns begins ther rumpus. He'll think ther bull shebang air goin' ter smash all ter onc't."

A cheer of approval followed from the crowd, and Pig Pretzel, although half-sea-sover, realized that he had started the bummers on a steep down grade toward intoxication; and that, should he put on the brakes, it would cause an unpleasantness, that would be far from being beneficial to his establishment, and himself personally.

Consequently he again "set 'em up."

The half-drunken men were now eager to carry out the programme they had already decided upon before Pig Pretzel had proposed it.

It would not be the first time they had frightened a "tenderfoot"—for such they believed Will Stone to be—out of his wits, and out of the burg. Their mode of operations will be known as we proceed. Hitherto they had always succeeded.

Although our young friend had been but a short time in the mining regions, he had been a most careful observer, and was well up in the character and habits of those with whom he was, for the present, obliged to mingle.

However, the proceedings of the roughs of Boulder City were destined to be so desperate, that Will was forced to decide that he had struck a town populated by pirates, to whom a human life was of no more consideration than that of a dog. Several times, while penning the epistle to Maude Malcolm, he had been obliged to stop, in utter amazement, and listen to what was going on below; but the noise was such that he could form no idea of what was transpiring in the bar.

He was not the man, however, to be in the least intimidated by the disturbance, or to hesitate a moment; so, after finishing his letter, he was about going down-stair.

He wished to ascertain the time of the arrival and departure of the stage, and to leave the letter for Maude in charge of the landlord, that it might be sent by the driver to the nearest post-office. Down the stairs he went, but not until he had reached the main floor, and turned to the left, was the large bar and gaming-room opened to view. One of the bummers had been stationed beneath the stairway, and as soon as Will left his room, the spy gave a gesture, as a signal to his companions.

Then several shots were fired, and yells of seeming rage followed.

Will Stone made no pause. He simply put his hand to his revolvers and bowie.

It was dark outside, and the lamps gave but a dim light within the large apartment, rendering the scene more impressive.

Desperate conflicts, with knives and pistols, were going on around. In front of the bar, full a dozen men were fighting wildly in a mingled mass. Revolvers vomited fire and lead, and bowies flashed on every side. The next moment, Will felt a singular sensation in his thumb and finger, in which he held the letter, and detected the landlord aiming a revolver, and firing at him.

Jerking up his hand, the young man saw that a bullet had passed through the letter.

This state of affairs infuriated him.

He jerked the letter into his pocket, and, with a revolver in each hand, sprang upon a table, and yelled:

"Up hands, every mother's son of you, or down you go! I didn't want a piece of the pie, but you crowded me into it. Up hands, I say, or I'll bore you!"

So startled were the revelers that they failed to obey the order.

Then followed three shots in quick succession, shattering a decanter, and sending a bowie-knife flying out of the hand of one of the combatants. Two more quickly followed, the bullets tearing through the sombreros of a pair in the mixed conflict in front of the bar, followed by yells of terror from the crowd.

"Hold on thar, stranger; up we go!"

"Don't shoot! We're shammin'!"

"Run thar ranch, pard; we wilt!"

"We-uns cave! You're ther king-pin."

Every man in the room now stood, with uplifted and empty hands, while the valiant landlord trembled, as if in an ague-fit, beneath the bar—hid away among his demijohns, where he had crawled for safety.

"Get up, there, or I'll make *bona fide* 'stiffs' of both of you!" yelled Will, as he let fly at two apparently dead men, one of whom lay beneath the table, and the other in the doorway. They needed no second urging.

They were on their feet in an instant, and extended their hands above their heads. The dead were restored to life. The wounded had no complaints, seemingly, to utter.

Will Stone, the fresh, the tenderfoot, had caused the whole crowd to wilt—the crowd that had calculated so positively on "taking him in out of the dew."

Clearly, he was master of the situation.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MAN IN THE MASK.

"Now, boys," said Will Stone, coolly and calmly; "I advise you that the next time you put up a racket on a stranger, you use a little judgment in selecting your victim. I could have laid out a dozen of you, but I am not at all bloodthirsty."

"I have come to Boulder City, to stay until I get ready to leave it. This is a free country, but there is a limit to the free use of lead. But speak up now, and tell the square truth! Does that whisky-soaked Dutchman know where his lead is going, when he shoots?"

"Nary time, boss!"

"He c'u'dn't hit ther Booze Bazaar, 'cross ther trail, from his door!"

Thus answered two of the nearest bummers.

"Then, I'm going to mop the floor with him! Look at this letter which I had just prepared for the mail. He put a bullet through it, when I turned the corner from the stairs."

"That proves that my life was in danger, for the fool, knowing his bullet might go through my heart or my brain, nevertheless fired directly at me. I saw him when he did it."

The amazed and frightened men, sobered by the turn in affairs, and looking upon Will with respect and admiration, gazed at the perforated letter which he held out before them.

At that very moment there shot into the front entrance of Boulder Hotel a masked man, seated on a superb black horse—indeed, the man was clothed in sable velvet from head to foot!

The masked rider shot forward with a terrific bound, knocking to the floor and trampling upon some of the dumfounded range bummers, directly past the table upon which Will stood petrified with astonishment, the letter still in his hand. Like a flash he shot past him, clutching the letter and thrusting it into his pocket; at the same instant spurring the black horse without mercy, bounding over tables and chairs

to the rear door, through which the steed plunged into the darkness and the open air!

So dazed was the young man by the dash of the daring masked rider into the room and the snatching of the letter from his hand—this last proving that the man, who was evidently an outlaw, had made the reckless charge for the purpose of securing the epistle—all this occurring in one flitting moment, so paralyzed Will that when he did recover and presented his revolver, cocking and pulling trigger, in his excitement he attempted to fire the weapon, the chambers of which he had emptied in breaking up the "circus."

He sprang from the table to the door; but the moon had not yet arisen and darkness ruled, screening from view the sable horse and its sable rider.

Pig Pretzel thought that really the world had come to an end; or, at least, that small portion of it known as Boulder City.

As he cowered, quivering with terror, beneath the bar, he believed by the din that his "hovel" had certainly gone to smash.

Much he regretted having made such an idiot of himself as to start the "circus," which had terminated in so disastrous a manner and so different from what he had pictured.

No longer were beer and pretzels in his mind. These loved luxuries would do him no good, for he believed the "pig pilgrim" would certainly slay him after shooting all the poor men whom he had inveigled into the game, and to their death. He had seen frontier "terrors" before, and he had a holy horror of men who shot others down just to see them "kick;" but it was only on his own account, for when a "stiff" was planted there was always a good run on his bar, following the mournful ceremonies.

Although Will Stone could not see the masked horseman he heard the clatter of the horse's hoofs, and bounding to the place where he had staked his own animal, but a few paces in the rear of the hotel—he having removed the beast from the stable to the open air after feeding—he quickly equipped the animal, sprang astride, and galloped up the stage trail; as he knew, by the sound of hoofs, that the mysterious rider had not kept on the sward in the rear of the shanties, but was dashing over the hard traveled street.

The terror-stricken bummers rushed to the front entrance of the Boulder Hotel; and, as lights from the open doors of the shanties on both sides of the street partly dispelled the darkness, they all saw the daring stranger, who had "taken the starch" out of them, in place of their causing him to "wilt," dash at headlong speed up the rise; and, by listening intently, they detected the sound of hoofs far ahead, indicating the presence of the masked equestrian.

A rousing cheer burst from all; and, out from Booze Bazaar and the shanties, rushed a number of men, just in time to catch a glimpse of Will as he galloped madly away.

Quite a crowd had arrived at the front of Boulder Hotel, drawn thither by the sounds of conflict; and, as the occurrences were related by the bummers, who were obliged, by their admiration of the "sand" displayed by the "fresh," to give the latter his just due, they in turn, repeated this to others. Soon the whole population of the burg swarmed to the front of the hotel, the greatest excitement prevailing at the advent in the burg of, not only a man who proved himself a "chief," but of a genuine full-fledged road-agent.

Boulder City was half-wild with excitement, and excitement was very agreeable to the majority of its denizens, who were actually wild with joy at the prospect of "fun," in hunting outlaws; none doubting that the appearance of the rider, in the regulation mask, was but the introduction of a series of lively and startling events.

The loud praises of Will Stone, by the bummers, and their description of him also created great curiosity, not devoid of pride and satisfaction; for he had proclaimed, that he had come to stay.

There was no movement made to assist Will in the capture of the mysterious rider, as all knew it would be useless in the darkness after such long delay; and they swarmed in a crowd, opposite the hotel, commenting upon the events of the evening. Only one man thought of ascertaining the name of the stranger. This he did, by examining the little account-book, used by Pig Pretzel for a register.

After glancing at the note-book, the miner rushed back to the door, and yelled loudly:

"Feller-cits! Ther slam-up stranger's handle air Willyum Stone. I motions we-uns christens him Boulder Bill. Ther cog s'f's him ter a dot!"

Wild, rousing cheers for Boulder Bill rung out from the crowd; and, at that very moment, the moon peeped out, illumining the range and the foot-hills. All gazed up the stage-trail, but not a moving object was within view.

But, in a minute more, the crowd, after listening breathlessly, gave a yell of exultation.

The report of a revolver sounded loud on the still night air. A moment after, another and yet another report followed; and the "cits" became almost frantic with excitement. They knew that the shots were fired close up to the

base of the range, where there were many coverts into which a horseman could dash to avoid a foe.

The proprietor of Booze Bazaar stood outside his "shebang," filled with mingled feelings of satisfaction and jealous rage; the former, because the excitement of the night would keep the "cits" up late, and cause frequent calls for refreshments; the latter, because the startling occurrences had taken place in the Boulder Hotel, and not in his own high-toned establishment.

Had Long Horn known of the position and state of mind of Pig Pretzel, he would not have felt quite so envious of his competitor.

Ere long, out from the pines and bowlders, and into the stage trail, dashed the hero of the night, upon his magnificent steed. Throwing a black sombrero into the air, he called out:

"Gentlemen, the black masker got away from me; but there's his bat, with one of my bullets through it, proving that I gave him a close call."

"I'll have him yet, and pay him for stealing my letter. But, I say, do any of you know who Black Bob is, and how long he has been on the range? That's the name on a silver badge, which is shaped and engraved to represent a mail-bag slashed open by a knife. You'll see it on the sombrero which I captured."

"Now for that cuss who shot a hole through my letter! This is a most infernal bother, having to write it over again."

So eager were all the "cits" to examine the sombrero, that the young man received no immediate answer; but, as he turned his horse, one in the crowd cried out:

"I've bin hyer, stranger, ever since ther burg war slapped up, but I never heard o' Black Bob. Reckon he's a fresh bag-slasher."

Will rode off at once, again staked his horse, and returned to the hotel, enraged at the ruining of his letter by Pig Pretzel, and the stealing of it by Black Bob. The latter had yelled, in taunting tones, when his pursuer had fired at him:

"I take your letter this trip, Will Stone. Next time I take Major Malcolm, and the next the person to whom this is addressed, Miss Maude Malcolm. After that, I'll attend to you!"

No wonder was it that Will was dumfounded, at hearing thus his own name, and the names of his friends, on the first night after his arrival in Boulder City. He was filled with rage against the wretched landlord, who had been the cause of all this; for had not the bullet passed through the letter, he would not have exhibited the epistle, which resulted in its loss.

It was terrible to the young man, to think that his letter to Maude should be in the hands of a stranger, and especially an outlaw.

Pig Pretzel was in danger.

The fire that flashed in Will's eyes, as he entered the bar room, proved this.

His first night in Boulder City bade fair to be an eventful one.

CHAPTER XII.

AN HONOR TO THE BURG.

The threats that had been made by the masked rider, proved him to be an enemy, not only to Will Stone, but to the Malcolms as well.

The outlaw had not had any opportunity to read the address on the letter; consequently he must know Maude, and must be from St. Louis.

Will knew he had no enemy in that city—indeed, hardly an acquaintance.

Who could the masked man be?

It did not seem possible that the beautiful and amiable Maude Malcolm could have an enemy. There was but one way to explain it.

The enmity of this outlaw could only have arisen from his having been an admirer of the fair Maude, a suitor for her hand; and he had sworn revenge, upon learning, in some mysterious manner, that she had given her love to the man who had rescued her, at the time of the destruction of the River Rover.

But the threat of this villain seemed to imply that Maude would in the course of time, be in Boulder City, or its vicinity; and nothing could be more absurd, or unreasonable than this. Will could make neither head nor tail of the affair. The occurrences of the evening seemed more like a dream than aught else, and the young man determined to give his mind a rest on the perplexing subjects, and to keep his eyes open.

He resolved to hunt the audacious scoundrel, who had stolen his letter in so extraordinary a manner, and to throttle him into an explanation. But this was far more easily said than done, as Will was destined to find out.

First, however, he would punish the cowardly landlord, who might have accidentally put a bullet through him, instead of the letter. But, he must also gain the good will of the denizens of Boulder City.

He had, he knew, created a favorable impression upon the rugged bummers, who had "put up a job" on him; but these men were not of the right stamp to "tie to."

He knew not that these very "roughs" had extolled him to the skies, and that the cheers of

the crowd, when he rode up had been for him. Uncertain how his next act would be received, Will nevertheless strode into the hotel, determined to give the miserable proprietor a lesson that he would remember, even did he, by so doing, gain the ill-will of the citizens and endanger his own life.

Such was his anger at the consequences of the "racket," which he felt sure Pig Pretzel had started and carried out to the best of his ability, in revenge for his not treating the crowd, that the young man could hardly control himself. He ground his teeth as he walked hastily, and with something like contempt and disdain stamped upon his handsome face, between the overturned tables and chairs to the bar.

At that very moment, as if they knew that Will had entered from the rear, the crowd surged in from the street in front, all gazing with wonder and curiosity, not devoid of admiration, at the commanding form of the young stranger.

Again there rung out wild cheers for Boulder Bill, but he paid no attention to this until one of the bummers sprung forward, saying:

"That's yeou, pard! We-uns hez christened yer Boulder Bill, cos yer tuck ther starch outen us Boulder City boyees, from ther word 'go,' an' sides yer rale name air Stone. A purty 'properate cog, I calls hit."

Will raised his sombrero politely to the crowd, and returned:

"Thanks, gentlemen, for the kindness and good-will expressed by your cheers. I have done nothing to merit them, and I beg pardon for having seemed so ill-bred as not to acknowledge the honor you have extended me; but I knew nothing until this moment of your having given me a frontier cognomen."

"I don't usually drink anything stronger than beer, but I will join you presently in a glass of wine. I have business with the landlord, which admits of little delay."

"The fact is, gentlemen, our Dutch friend started the little racket on me, and came near shooting me, besides being the cause of the loss of my letter. It is not pleasant to have our private correspondence in the hands of another, and especially one who dares not show his face to honest men. I shall prove to that worthy German that he can't play his games on me."

"He's a fine specimen of landlord, to practice pistol-shooting on his guests. Where is the cowardly cur—does any one know?"

"Hain't see'd him since," said one.

"Reckon he's skuted."

"We-uns'll 'pint yeou ter run ther shebang, Boulder Bill—dang me ef we don't—ef Pig hev levanted!"

Thus called out Will's admiring followers.

Behind the bar, among the demijohns, the young man soon perceived the terrified landlord. The discovery filled him with disgust and rage.

Here was a contemptible coward, indeed!

Will might have been slain by the cur, and the latter would have boasted of the deed to the end of his days.

Clutching the legs of Pig Pretzel, he jerked him from beneath the counter, and then thrust his head and shoulders into the half-barrel of dirty water that had been used in washing glasses.

When nearly drowned, Will dragged Pig out and laid him on the bar, gasping and sputtering.

This act created for the young stranger one friend, at least, who would stand by him to the death. This was Long Horn, the proprietor of Booze Bazaar, whose yells of exultant gratification resounded above all; for he felt sure that his rival would be ruined in the estimation of the "cits," and that Pig's customers would now flock to the Bazaar.

Long Horn resolved to watch keenly the run of affairs, and to take any advantage that presented itself to favor himself and his business.

Picking up Pig Pretzel's revolver, Will Stone sprung upon the bar, crying out:

"You see that pistol, gentlemen? There is one load gone from the cylinder. The bullet from that empty chamber passed through the letter which I held in my hand at the time. I saw this cowardly wretch shoot at me. You who know him tell me that he could not hit the side of a house. Consequently the bullet, as far as he was concerned, might have killed me."

"He is a murderer at heart, and a coward! He run in a racket on me, his guest, but he slipped up on it. He ought to be run out of the burg!"

"That's so—dang'd ef hit ain't! 'Rah for Boulder Bill!" interrupted Long Horn.

"But," continued Will, "I propose to make him drink a pint of his own vile whisky. That will punish him, and will teach him to keep out of mischief hereafter."

There was no hesitation, after Will had announced the penalty he proposed to inflict; but, if the truth was known, there were few among the crowd that could understand how Will came to the conclusion that he was, in any way, punishing Pig Pretzel.

In fact, many would have been pleased to

have taken the punishment themselves, in the landlord's place.

Jerking the wretch to a sitting posture, the young man took a bottle from the shelf and poured out a brimming glass of the whisky. Then, pointing his revolver at Pig's head, he said sternly:

"Drink that vile stuff before I count five, or I'll blow your eye-winkers off!"

Pig Pretzel seized the glass with trembling hand, and, although the liquor nearly strangled him, he drank it to the last drop. He dared not meet the glances of the citizens, for he knew by their ejaculations and murmurings that, if he had any friends among them, they would not dare show their friendship.

The presence of Long Horn, his rival in business, and the words of the latter, almost crushed him.

Again was the glass filled, Will crying out:

"Drink!"

Thus, amid cheers and laughter, the landlord was forced to drink five brimming glasses of the vilest of his own whisky, one quick following the other.

The last glass was swallowed with the greatest difficulty, and then Pig Pretzel, with bulging and bloodshot eyes, and inflamed face, keeled over upon the bar slab, helplessly drunk.

"That's what I calls a waste o' bug juice, pard Bill," said Long Horn. "Now I motions tbat all hands glides over ter my ranch. Shut up ther Boulder Hotel, with ther Dutch in hit. Ef he doesn't hev snakes in his shoes by mornin', I'll chaw my own years off!"

Tremendous cheers greeted Long Horn's invitation.

"Hold on, my friend!" reasoned Will, "your offer is liberal, but I propose that when we cross the street, all hands drink at my expense. The first treat should be from this bar."

"The landlord, who is as mean and cowardly as they make them, has been pouring down poison alone, right before you all; and that, after putting up a racket on me, because I did not patronize his bar when I first arrived."

"Mr. Long Horn, as you are accustomed to the business, please accommodate us by acting as barkeeper, and give every man here fair show for his whisky. I'll take Scotch ale. I see there are a few bottles here."

The yells of approbation that followed this were almost deafening. All appreciated the humor of the new arrival in the burg, who had stepped at once into their good graces.

Will Stone was acting to please every one.

His leniency toward Pig Pretzel, and the original mode of punishment he had selected, just suited the crowd, after they saw its effects.

With a yell of triumph, that would have shamed an Apache, Long Horn sprung over his rival's bar at a bound; slamming glasses, bottles, and decanters upon the same, with a freedom that caused the thirsty ones to yell with joyous anticipation of what was coming.

There was no discount on Boulder Bill.

He was an honor to the burg, and wild cheers rung for the latest adopted citizen.

CHAPTER XIII.

FALLING AMONG FRIENDS.

WILL STONE bore his honors without any outward appearance of recognizing that they were tendered, or that he deserved any praise, for his manly conduct.

He saw at a glance that Long Horn was the man of all men in the burg to tie to; that the Texan had great influence, and was brave and fearless, besides showing plainly that he liked him and his ways exceedingly.

After all had drank, Boulder Bill, as we must at times call our young friend, proposed that they should cross the street to the Booze Bazaar; but claiming that it was his treat by right, as he was a stranger, and had not "wet" his introduction to the burg. The last had been the forced treat of Pig Pretzel, he explained, and they would leave the delectable Dutchman to sleep off the effects of the over-dose of his own merchandise.

The proposition was received with boisterous cheers, and the motley crowd backed out from the bar.

Among the illuminating arrangements of the Boulder Hotel, were some half-dozen candles; and Will determined to do all in his power to win the respect and friendship of the citizens, whom he believed he would need as friends. Drawing his revolver, therefore, he fired, in quick succession, as many shots over the heads of the crowd, in different directions, each bullet extinguishing a candle.

This exhibition of marksmanship drew more cheers, for Boulder Bill could have done nothing that would cause the spectators to respect him more, than this proof of skill with his revolver.

The oil-lamps were then turned out, Pig Pretzel left in darkness and drunkenness; and then, after locking the door, and pushing the key under the same, the noisy crowd crossed the street.

Long Horn insisted that it was his "set 'em up," but this Boulder Bill would not allow. He gained his point, but only by agreeing that the

Texan might do as he pleased in that respect afterward.

Thus it was that our young friend found himself associating familiarly with, and treating in a bar-room, a motley crowd of as hard cases as ever were collected together; most of them, however, being square and hard-working miners, but who had, probably, every one of them, been called upon to defend their persons and rights with revolvers and bowies.

The Booze Bazaar had a large bar-room, and the proprietor swore by the "bleed of Crockett," he kept better "bug juice," than any man on the range.

Amid all the boisterous confusion, Boulder Bill was busy in thought; although no one would have thought from his face, that such was the case. The stealing of his letter, and the words of the masked rider, became more and more puzzling and unaccountable. One thing was certain; he had an enemy near the burg—one who was reckless and daring, and who, doubtless, had many to back him.

This being the case, it was well to guard against the man in black.

To be forewarned was to be forearmed, and he must be prepared for any emergency.

Boulder Bill had acted a part which he had never before practiced, but he had acted it well. He had gained the friendship of all the citizens, whose friendship was worth anything.

He was yet to find, however, that the occurrences of the night were not at an end; and that the next thing on the programme would prove to be of vast benefit to him, although proceeding from a more unexpected source than the other surprises he had experienced.

Liquor was poured out, and a noisy clicking of glasses followed, mingled with strange toasts, which were fairly yelled; but the voice of Long Horn rung high above all others, as he cried out:

"Hyer's ter ther bestest man, what's struck ther burg, Boulder Bill; an' what's now a cit o' Bowlder City!"

Cheers greeted the toast, and the recipient bowed his thanks, as all swallowed their liquor.

As the glasses rung empty on the bar, in through the door, with great velocity, shot a very ugly mule of Spanish stock; its neck covered with wood-ticks, and its hair seeming to grow "every which way," as Long Horn afterward put it.

Every man whirled about, standing with his back against the bar, in the utmost amazement; not at the mule, however, but at the most peculiar specimen of humanity who rode the beast, and his equally peculiar manner of riding.

The new-comer, who had arrived in so strange a manner without announcement, or even leaving his four-footed friend outside, was a most powerfully-built man, indeed gigantic; he being forced to bend his legs upward, to avoid dragging them.

A most comical picture he presented, in more ways than one, as will be seen.

In the first place he sat reversed, facing the rear of his mule; one hand clutching the animal's tail, the other reaching behind him, and holding fast to one of the beast's long ears. Thus supported, however, he found it a hard matter to retain his seat; for he reeled from side to side, nearly falling at every bound of the mule.

The man was clothed in ragged buckskin breeches, much soiled, as was also his red flannel shirt; his toes being plainly visible through rents in his rough boots.

Tangled whiskers and hair that had long been a stranger to a comb, and both of which were long and dusty, did not tend to improve his appearance. The sunburnt and blistered condition of his face was explained by the absence of a hat. This was partly remedied by the stranger having pressed upon his head a large tin can, evidently found at some deserted camp. This can was fully eighteen inches in height, and loomed up brightly far above the brow of its wearer, serving to draw the sun, more than to be any protection against it.

The effect was simply ludicrous in the extreme.

The new-comer's mouth, a prodigious one, was partly open, his eyes partly closed, and he appeared to be entirely unconscious of his surroundings. That he was suffering greatly, no one, who looked at him, could doubt for a moment.

The mule shot past the crowd into the gaming portion of the establishment; then, finding no exit, the rear door being closed, it returned, with great clatter toward the front entrance.

All the observers had been so astonished at the sudden and unexpected advent of man and mule, that they were speechless; their eyes all fixed upon the strange pair in wonder and bewilderment.

Before the mule reached the front door, however, Boulder Bill sprung forward and grabbed the beast by the muzzle, holding it fast, as he cried out:

"Whisky, Long Horn! Whisky! This poor fellow is nearly dead!"

It needed no second call from the young man to produce the liquor; the Texan running hastily with bottle and glass.

Their first surprise over, the citizens gathered in a circle around the strange arrival, and Bowlder Bill directed one to hold the mule.

Seizing the bottle quickly, Bill poured out a liberal drink, passed the bottle to Long Horn, and then, throwing the tin can to the floor, took the head of the sufferer on his arm, and poured the liquor slowly down the poor man's throat.

The effect was almost instantaneous, and equally as startling as had been the man's arrival.

Bowler Bill caught the expression of face and eye, as the whisky put new life into the sufferer, but without bringing him to a realization of his present condition and sufferings. The man had evidently been in a semi-unconscious state.

Bill decided at once, by a glance into the honest blue eyes, that this stranger, although so forlorn and wretched, indeed on the border of death, from a protracted spree—the end of which caught him where he could not get the needed liquor to brace him up—was one who would be all right, were not that in the way.

Appearances, it was true, were much against him, and pointed to his being a fugitive from justice, in long hiding, or some other questionable character.

It had been but a moment after the liquor had been swallowed before, with a wild whoop, the man sprung erect, the mule bounding forward and wrenching itself free from the miner who held it. The huge form of the stranger reeled from side to side, and back and forth, while he stood with limbs spread, the better to sustain his position; and instinctively placed his hand on the mule's head, grasping one of the animal's ears.

He did not appear to know where he was, or indeed that any human being except himself was near.

His eyes were fixed and expressionless. His lower jaw dropped, as if he had no control of the muscles.

So dumfounded were the spectators, that not one spoke a word.

Even the half intoxicated men seemed to have been sobered.

Bowler Bill made a gesture for all to remain thus. Then, pouring out another stiff glass of liquor, he placed the same to the sufferer's lips.

The mere smell of the whisky appeared to act favorably upon the man, for his jaw raised, his lips, all cracked and blistered, closed naturally about the glass, and, with Bill's assistance, the liquor was swallowed, he having to be partly sustained, and his head held upward.

A heavy groan, followed by a sigh, burst from the man's lips; yet his eyes appeared to be fixed on vacancy. At length he spoke.

"Nighly to hell, I reckon."

These words came from the huge stranger in a strange, hoarse whisper, and his form, naturally Herculean in strength, as was plainly to be seen, trembled and shivered, as if some horrible sight had been presented to his mind's eye.

Again came that strange whisper, which caused the blood, even of the half-drunken bummers, to chill.

"I'm Bug-Juice Bill, from Whiskyville, Senor Satan, but yer can't corral me—not much!"

"I goes ter t'other place, whar Nannie an' ther kid went, when ther 'Paches killed 'em. I've bin tough since thet, an' death yelps hev bin sweet ter heer, but it war all on 'count o' Nannie an' ther kid."

"I'm goin' ter see 'em, Satan. Git from my trail, or down goes yer meat-house! Comin', Nannie! Bill's comin', but hit's a awful long trail, an' ther sun's hot!"

As these words, sounding as strange as if from the lips of the dead, ceased, Long Horn stepped behind the bar, returning quickly with some blankets. Then he said, in a low tone:

"Pards, lay the poor pilgrim down! Dang hit, I thought I knowed him! Hit's Bill Bentley, from Taos-way. Ther 'Paches killed his wife an' leetle boy, more'n a year back; an' ther way he's fit reds an' poured down whisk' since then air just tremendous. He's a four-bar'ld terror, he air; an' ez squar'es they make 'em."

Bowler Bill had been, from the first, greatly impressed in the poor man's favor; and more so after his words, and those of Long Horn.

Ready hands bore the giant to the back part of the immense room, spread blankets, and then laid him down; the mule following, and presently lying down beside its master.

It was a most impressive scene.

Surely it had been a night of strange happenings in Bowlder City.

CHAPTER XIV.

A RICH FIND.

In spite of the many things that Will Stone had to ponder over, he could not keep the giant stranger from his thoughts.

There was much in the few words spoken by Long Horn, in connection with the history of the strange man, from "Taos-way," to awaken the strongest sympathy and pity in Bowlder Bill's heart.

This man had become almost a merciless Ne-

mesis, and a slave to drink, since his wife and child had been butchered. Originally he must have been a true specimen of manhood, honest, brave and fearless; and so he was still, except when demoralized by drink.

"Bug-Juice Bill" was evidently a diamond in the rough, and Will resolved, not only that he would be his friend, but that he would strive to win him back to sobriety, and to himself.

First, however, he must re-write his letter to Maude.

Asking his Texan host to excuse his public withdrawal, he effected an entrance into Bowlder Hotel, and, lifting a candle, proceeded, with but a single glance at the dead drunk Pig Pretzel, to his apartment under the roof.

Here, his surprise may be imagined, at finding upon the table, which he knew had nothing upon it when he left, a letter, addressed to himself.

Tearing off the envelope, his astonishment was doubled at seeing the very epistle that had been jerked from his hand by the masked rider.

A second folded paper fell from it; and catching it up, the young man glanced it over. It read, as follows:

"HEAD-QUARTERS, BAG-SLASHERS.

"MR. WILLIAM STONE:—I beg to return the epistle which I borrowed so unceremoniously. May I ask if you will equal my courtesy, by leaving my sombrero at the same point where you found it?"

"Your letter to Miss Malcolm is quite affectionate—indeed, I may say exceedingly so. But, Will Stone, you have crossed my path, and I am merciless. Your every footstep is watched."

"Startling events have welcomed you to Bowlder City, but the end is not yet. You have seen but the overture to my tragic drama."

"Your firm foe,

"BLACK BOB."

Over and over again, Bowlder Bill read this strange communication.

Who, in the name of wonder, was Black Bob? And why was he seeking revenge upon him—an entire stranger?

It seemed, too, that this villain had also vengeful intentions toward Major Malcolm and his daughter.

But this was too absurd to be thought of.

Black Bob could, in no way, injure him; for they were still in St. Louis, and he, as yet, knew nothing of the major's resolution to go West.

The masked outlaw might be mad, but clearly there was method in his madness. It must be, that he believed Will to be some other man. But then, his coupling the Malays with him, in his sworn vengeance, banished that idea.

One thing alone seemed certain. Black Bob was from St. Louis, and he had been an admirer of Maude Malcolm. By some means he must have heard of the loss of the River Rover, and what had followed, and hence sought his life.

Will's mind was made up.

He would hunt the hunter.

He resolved that he would capture Black Bob, and force an explanation from him.

Although retiring very late, Bowlder Bill arose early; more, however, from being aroused, than from any intention or inclination to do so. The cause of his being awakened, was a most startling and unearthly shriek from below.

Hastily descending the stairs, he found that it was far from being light in the gaming and bar-room. Striding to the front door, Will unlocked it, and threw it open. The sun had not as yet arisen, but there was a bright glow in the east, announcing its speedy advent.

The cause of the disturbance was soon explained. The landlord had awakened from his drunken slumber, with a demoralized brain.

Bowler Bill experienced a feeling of pity for the unfortunate wretch. Doubtless the occurrences of the previous evening would not have happened, had Pig Pretzel been sober—indeed, our young friend felt positive of this.

With this thought uppermost, he strode around the bar.

The miserable landlord lay, trembling with terror, in the same place that he had occupied, when thrown upon the bar-slab, the night before.

"Come, Dutchy! Get out of that, take an 'eye-opener,' and straighten up. But remember, and never again indulge in revolver practice among your guests. If a fellow like you must shoot, he ought to get out in the middle of the Staked Plains."

So saying, he assisted Pig Pretzel to his feet.

A wretched-looking object he was. His face was bloated, and of a dark-red color, and his small eyes were bloodshot and wild in expression, while he trembled excessively.

Bowler Bill perceived that the landlord had not understood him; so, pouring out a glass of whisky, he banded it to him.

Pig saw by this, and the manner and expression of his guest, that the latter held no animosity toward him. Relief was at once stamped upon his face.

The liquor revived him, and he grasped the hand of Bowlder Bill in both his own, saying:

"Gott in Himmel pless you, Powlter Bill! I vos not know vare I vos ven I voked up, und I sees you, py tam, layin' ober dare already; all plood! Und I sees der mans, vot I gits in dot

ragget, all layin' roun' dot dables. Den I hears dumpl' dumpl' on de stairs, und I dinks der tyfl' gooms for Pig Pretzel."

"Dot scare 'pout tead mineseluff! I could cough up mine heart, it vos so loose. Put dot vos all right now. You shakes mit me. You dinks Pig Pretzel grazzy trunk ven he shoots; und, py tam, dot vos so! I loats dot bistel no more."

"You vos mine friendt. Shtay in mine hodel den year, und dot vos all right; I sharge you nodings. Come, dake somedings mit Pig Pretzel!"

With a hearty laugh, Bowlder Bill returned:

"We'll say no more about our little unpleasantness, Dutchy! To please you, and to show that I hold no ill-will, I'll take a glass of ale with you. Then I must ask you to excuse me, for I have much to attend to this morning."

This ceremony finished, Bowlder Bill signified his intention to be at Bowlder Hotel again before long; and then crossed the street to Bazaar, being watched all the way by Pig Pretzel, whose bloated face expressed his jealousy as he saw Long Horn unlock and open the door at the young man's knock, grasping his hand as though he was the man he most desired to meet.

The landlord of the "Booze" smiled, as he caught a glimpse of his competitor. He had now a "soft thing" on him—an advantage, which he would not be apt to let pass to benefit his own business.

"Long Horn, good-morning, old boy! How is our guest?" was the greeting of Bowlder Bill.

"How-dy? Hopes yer had a beffy snooze, pard. Es fer Bug-Juice Bill, I hain't see'd er heard him yet. Dog-goned ef Pig Pretzel ain't on hand early! What did ther thick-headed Dutchman hev ter say fer himself?"

"He was about frightened to death, but I let him down easy. You see, he was drunk last night; so I 'shook,' and said we'd let the thing drop."

"Ye're too good a man fer ther range, Bowlder Bill!" asserted Long Horn. "Ther dang'd Dutchman would ha' gut bored through his bestest bleed-mersheen ef he'd played that game on anybody else 'roun' this burg. He'll stan' watchin', an' I'm goin' ter keep my best peeper outer him. Let's liquor!"

"Just a pony of Scotch ale, Long Horn. That's me, this morning. I've got to keep my head clear. Pour out a reuser fer Bug-Juice Bill, and I'll take it to him."

The sounds that now reached them showed that the giant from Whiskyville, as he had announced himself, was awake.

Will proceeded at once with a glass of whisky toward the rear door, which he opened to allow the morning light to enter.

Bug Juice Bill was sitting up, his forehead clasped in his hands, as the young man approached.

"Good-morning, my friend," said Will, as he held the glass toward him; "I hope you have slept well and that you feel more like yourself. Here is something to brace you up. The hair of the dog is good for the bite—so they say, at least."

"Stranger, God bless yer!" exclaimed the man, with deep feeling. "I sw'ar ye're ther fu'st man I've see'd fer many moons, thet hed a pleasant word fer Bug-Juice Bill! Hyer's luck ter yer, an' dang me ef I doesn't mean thet hit shall be luck!"

"Ef I doesn't pay yer fer this, I hopes ter be baked with dogs, an' my bones gnawed by 'Pache squaws! Stranger, what's yer bandle?"

"William Stone, at your service; but the boys have decided to call me Bowlder Bill. But come, you had better have some breakfast with me, and then fix up, and you'll be O. K."

Bug Juice Bill arose with difficulty, saying:

"Ye're jist ther pilgrim I've bin luntin'. I sw'ar yer sha'n't never be sorry yer struck Bug-Juice Bill! Hev yer a critter hyer in ther burg?"

"Yes, Bill; a noble beast at that!"

"Then, git! Taos," looking at his mule, and pointing to the door; "git! an' ter grass, lively! I shell want yer 'fore soon—want yer bad!"

As if understanding every word, the mule walked quickly from the building.

The Texan host now prepared a good breakfast, having started a camp fire in the rear of the building. When this had been duly discussed, Will again crossed the street to attend to his horse.

While the young man was thus engaged, Bug-Juice Bill joined him, and said, in a low voice:

"Bowlder Bill, I meant every word I said just now. Look et thet little rock, but hold her fast. Ther sight o' thet 'ud run Bowlder City wild in five minutes. Keep rum, an' git ready ter levant with me an' my mule. I'm ther most miser'ble cuss ter gaze on, you c'u'd meet; but I've struck a bonanza which air fer both of us."

"We're pards, an' millionairs in a few moons; er I hopes never ter see Nannie an' ther kid up 'bove. Not a wag o' tongue, but git ready ter git up an' git! Es I said, yer won't be sorry yer come up wi' Bug Juice Bill."

Completely dumfounded, Bowlder Bill gazed

upon the piece of rock that had been placed in his hands.

It was almost entirely of virgin gold, mingled with quartz.

Bug-Juice Bill departed, leaving the young man gazing as if fascinated by the lump of ore—the metal that rules the world.

CHAPTER XV.

OFF FOR EL DORADO.

BOWLDER BILL knew that he held in his hand by far the richest piece of gold-bearing quartz that he had ever seen; and many specimens, from the most noted mines of Colorado, had been exhibited to him, while in Denver.

Well might Bug Juice Bill say that he had discovered a bonanza, if he had found a vein even three-fourths less rich than the specimen he had brought. And not for a moment, did the young man doubt, that the stranger from Taos had discovered such a mine. The latter was now comparatively sober. The two drinks he had taken had cleared his brain, and the hearty breakfast of which he had partaken had made a different man of him; but the expression of his face and eyes remained as before.

Boulder Bill was satisfied that the opinion he had formed of the man was correct; but yet, he realized that he had no claims upon him. His intention had been, to examine the mines in the vicinity of Boulder City, that very day; but here was, at once, an opening that promised a most princely fortune to both himself and Bug-Juice Bill.

For all this, as has been said, Will did not think it right to benefit by the luck of the Man from Taos. He must have further conversation with him immediately, and endeavor to persuade him not to drink, except in such moderation as was necessary to prevent him from actual torture, until he regained his usual strength of mind and body.

Secreting, therefore, the precious lump of quartz, Boulder Bill hastened to return to Booze Bazaar.

As yet there was no one astir in the burg.

The "jamboree" of the previous night had caused all to sleep later, many being locked out of Boulder Hotel, and thus compelled to crawl into adjacent pine thickets to sleep off their load of whisky.

To the agreeable surprise of the young man, he found Bug-Juice Bill pacing back and forth in the gaming-room, and evidently not caring to drink. Long Horn was engaged in arranging his bar, at the same time conversing with the Man from Taos, after the style of an old friend.

The latter gave Boulder Bill a wink of caution, but it was not needed.

"Pard," he said, as he entered, "I wish you would look at the frog of my nag's foot. There's a thorn in it, or there was I should say, for I pulled it out; but I'm afraid it will lame the animal."

"Hyer, pard Bill," spoke up Long Horn, as he passed a bottle; "pour some whisk' onto it three or four times. That'll take ther soreness outen hit."

"All right, Long Horn—thanks! I suppose that will be about the best thing."

Taking the bottle, Boulder Bill returned to his horse, the Man from Taos following him slowly.

There was no danger of their conversation being overheard, at the point where Will's horse was staked; and, as soon as the nag's foot had been well washed with the whisky, Bug-Juice Bill came up.

While both appeared to be examining the hoof of the horse, a conversation was carried on rapidly.

"You have given me," said our young friend, as the Man from Taos reached his side, "the greatest surprise of my life; and I am truly glad you have struck such a bonanza, as your specimen indicates. It knocks anything I have ever seen, but I must decline to profit by your discovery."

"I intended to purchase a mine here, if possible; and, if not, to prospect in the vicinity. But I cannot take advantage of your good nature and liberality, for you are in no way indebted to me. If you require assistance to develop your mine, I shall do all in my power for you."

"That's 'bout 'nough o' gab, Boulder Bill," returned the stranger; "I knowed jist what yer war goin' ter spit out, an' hit's all right, fer hit proves I hain't bin mistaken in ther sorter pilgrim I hed sot yer up ter be."

"But thar hain't no back out 'bout hit. Hit war luck—loads o' luck—fer me ter strike such a 'croppin', 'specially when I war 'bout blind drunk; but ther same luck follered me when I run ag'in' Boulder Bill. I war nigh on ter death, an' crazy es a loon fer want o' drink an' feed; but my mule brung me inter Boulder City an' straight ter Boulder Bill—jist sich a man es I war 'tendin' ter hunt."

"Yer see, I'm plum 'petered out,' struck 'bed rock' long ago, an' c'u'dn't raise 'dust' fer whisk' even. Hit doesn't need much lingo ter prove thet. Jist gaze et me!"

"I've struck this ore, and struck hit rich; but I c'u'dn't do nothin' ter count, in ther fix I'm

in. What I ses air, thet yeou furnish ther mersheeny an' furnaces, an' I'll furnish ther rock."

"We're equil pards in ther hull biz, an' yer hain't got no call ter go back on me. I've said hit, an' hit's got ter glide thet-a-way."

"Boulder Bill, hit warn't fur from ther burg, thet I knocked thet ore off; an' somebuddy mought find hit, fer I war so lunified thet I left plain trail. You jist glide outen ther town, long ahind ther shanties, an' I'll jine yer jist below ther eend o' ther street purty soon. I must hev some p'ison along, er I'll run plum wild ag'in."

"That's all! That's Bug-Juice Bill's vardict, an' yer hain't got no call ter back ag'in' hit. So-long, ontel I skute down rangel!"

The Man from Taos strode rapidly off, on his return to Booze Bazaar, without giving his new pard an opportunity to reply.

Little less astonished had Boulder Bill been, at being told that the mine was near the burg, than when he first gazed at the specimen.

He understood, from the words of this stranger, that he would, in no way, be taking advantage of him—in fact, that the benefits and profits would amount to nothing to the discoverer, unless he secured a partner with sufficient capital to work the mine. Not only so, but Bug-Juice Bill might get crazy drunk again, give away his secret, and thus perhaps lose everything.

As this occurred to Will, he at once made up his mind.

He would pard with this Man from Taos.

He would soon be a millionaire, or that specimen went for nothing.

From the fact that the discovery had been made near Boulder City, an immediate departure was necessary; as prospectors were wandering in every direction, each day and night, and they might happen to observe the trail of the man and mule near the point of the discovered mine.

Without delay Will equipped his horse, and mounting, walked the animal toward the appointed meeting place.

So strangely had the sight of the gold, and the words of the Man from Taos affected Boulder Bill, that even the letter which he intended to have written to Maude Malcolm was forgotten. Forgotten, also, was everything in connection with the masked rider, Black Bob.

Such is ever the fascinating power of gold, when its presence, near or far, in the earth, is known.

Fifteen minutes after, the two men vanished from view amid the pines and boulders below the burg.

Robert Rich, or Black Bob, had gotten right down to business on the very night succeeding his arrival at the cavern in the gulch.

When he first entered Boulder City, in disguise, with two of his men, all mounted upon mules, he had received his letter from Sleepy Sim, answered the same, and also written to his spies along the stage line. Then he had, after passing up the range, on his return to the cave, late in the afternoon, discovered Will Stone, passing along the stage road, toward the burg.

This had made the miscreant wild with exultant joy, and he rode back to the cave, elated at the prospects of soon fulfilling the first part of his vow of vengeance.

Upon entering the mount-enclosed valley, Black Bob was struck with the thought that much information might be obtained, which would forward his plans, from any letter that young Stone might write to Maude.

That he would write the young lady, Black Bob had no doubt, and he resolved to again enter the town, under cover of darkness, in his true character—thus giving the citizens a startling surprise, and an intimation, or proof, of the presence of a band of road-agents in their near vicinity. This he did, with the success detailed.

In a most unexpected manner, he had an opportunity presented to him, to secure the letter that Boulder Bill had written.

Then followed the race for life and the loss of his sombrero, together with a near call to join the ranks of the dead.

Close pressed by his pursuer, the outlaw was unable to control himself when an opening presented for escape. This rendered him reckless, and he yelled to Will, as has been recorded; feeling much joy that he had it in his power, in this way to torture his rival.

But he lost his sombrero, and very nearly lost his life, causing him to vow that he would be more prudent hereafter.

Black Bob did not return to his cave, but kindled a fire in a small gulch; and, by its light, perused the epistle that Will had penned to Maude Malcolm.

The hole made in it by the bullet, indicated that the young man had been shot at on his first appearance after it had been written. This explained the row, and the exhibition of the letter by Will in the bar-room.

His success, thus far, had been so flattering, that Black Bob once more entered the town; spying around, and at length gaining an entrance through the rear door into Boulder

Hotel. There, finding all dark and deserted, he lighted a candle, found Will's room without much trouble, and sitting down, wrote the letter which we have seen.

Inclosing this, and the one for Maude in an envelope, addressed to Will Stone, he returned to the cavern; satisfied that his hated rival intended to remain, and locate in Boulder City.

Black Bob vowed that he would prove to the "cits," and Will Stone especially, that his power was not to be sneered at, by committing a daring and criminal act under their very noses.

He prepared himself, and ordered his men to do the same, for a descent upon, and the capture of the coach, in the bright light of the coming morning; being confident that Major Malcolm would arrive on the stage, as information from his spies indicated, providing no delays had occurred.

CHAPTER XVI.

BLACK BOB OPENS THE BALL.

ABOUT the same time that Boulder Bill and the Man from Taos met, to the south of the burg, and just clear of the shanties, Black Bob, at the head of nearly a score of his followers, rode slowly out from the gulch. None, as yet, had put on their masks, and a more villainous-looking lot of men, it would have been difficult to collect together. Crime and dissipation were stamped deeply upon their brutal faces.

There was not one in the band who had not been "picked up" here and there by Black Bob, and when they were mere floating human wrecks.

This band, their leader had ordered to station themselves on the mountain-side, above the town, in case he should need them.

Consequently all had, as the moon arose, witnessed the chase of Black Bob by Boulder Bill; and, had the latter followed the outlaw chief much further, he would most certainly have been either captured or shot.

Black Bob, as far as was necessary, explained why he had thus fled from one man, and had failed to plant a bullet in his pursuer.

The band were beyond rifle range, up the mountain-side, and they saw their chief return to the burg, his object being afterward explained to them.

This proved conclusively to the Bag-Slashers that they had a leader who understood his business, and was both brave and reckless.

Thus Black Bob, by his entrance into Boulder City, accomplished a three-fold object. First, he gave the citizens to understand that road-agents were quartered near them. Secondly, he gave Will Stone cause for no little anxiety of mind; and, thirdly, he gained the entire confidence of his men.

He wanted the "cits" to know of his band, in order that they might search for his retreat; and then, in their absence, he could make a descent upon the burg.

When Will Stone shot his sombrero from his head, Black Bob sought not to recover it; for he wished the citizens to see his name on the badge, thus gaining still greater notoriety. In future, all crimes committed in the vicinity of Boulder City would be attributed to the Bag-Slashers, under the command of Black Bob.

Without a word in the line, the outlaws now proceeded from the gulch, winding amid the foothills and *mottes* of pine, cedar and cacti, until near the stage road, at a point adjacent to the swell, from the upper portion of which Boulder City could be seen at the foot of the decline. Here the nature of the ground favored them.

Stationing his men on each side of the trail amid the pines, with explicit directions as to proceeding when the signal should be given by him, Black Bob ordered four men to dismount and crouch on the border of the road, thence to bound out and hold the stage horses. These preparations were scarcely made when the stage was seen coming at full speed.

Let us now inspect it.

Black Bob seemed destined to be greatly favored at the commencement of his new career, for although the coach was full inside, there was not a single rough miner or borderer among the passengers. All, from their dress and manner, were, it was plain to see, from the States, evidently speculators, as their appearance denoted wealth, drawn to Boulder City by reports of the new and rich "strike."

Not only was the bandit chief thus favored, but the man he sought was among the number.

Major Malcolm was indeed in the stage, and his manner and expression proved that although fatigued by the long journey, he had great hopes of its happy results from the letter his friend had written him.

Besides the major, there were seven apparently well-to-do gentlemen in the Concord coach.

Rattling Rob, the driver, was in good spirits, and his six fine horses drew the conveyance along at terrific speed, dashing in amid the foothills on the winding trail, each moment threatening a wreck.

No one in the coach had the least thought of danger awaiting them from any other source.

Certainly none thought of road-agents, for

they had seen none on the long trip, and they had been laughed at, only at the last station, when they asked if danger was to be apprehended from robbers.

Upon returning to his concealed followers, Black Bob detected an advantage, which he had not previously thought of. Rattling Rob might shoot, as this would be the first time for him to be "pulled up," especially under the excitement of the moment; and the chief stationed the most powerful man in his band, upon the high boulder, with directions to bound upon the stage, knock the driver senseless, and take the ribbons. This would insure the thorough search of the passengers and coach, without any trouble from the redoubtable Rob.

The Bag Slashers now assumed their masks, and all sat their horses, the reins in their left hands, and cocked revolvers in their right.

Abreast of the boulder, the coach rolled at great speed. Then the scene changed, as if by magic.

A burly bandit sprang directly upon the box, in the rear of the driver, and Rattling Rob fell senseless from his seat, from a blow struck with the butt of a revolver. At the same instant, the reins were jerked from his hands, the huge outlaw pulling hard; while his four comrades clutched the bridles at the bits of the wheelers and leaders.

None within the coach had seen the bandit spring upon it. There had been nothing unusual, except that they had come suddenly to a halt.

This, however, caused the passengers to look out, that they might obtain a view of the team, and trail ahead; and, just as they caught a glimpse of the strange men holding fast to the affrighted horses, a shrill whistle sounded and out shot a dozen masked horsemen, with leveled revolvers, Black Bob at their head. The latter called out, in loud and commanding tones:

"Remain as you are, every man of you, or we'll blow your brains out!"

The passengers sat as if paralyzed. The next moment they were dragged through the coach windows, the pistols of the outlaws covering them. A more terrified and dumfounded party of men were never beheld.

"Two of you dismount, and drag those fellows into line! Lively, boys!"

Thus yelled Black Bob, and his orders were quickly obeyed.

Not a movement was made in the way of defense.

Not a word was uttered.

The passengers saw at once, that, to attempt to defend themselves would, undoubtedly, be the signal for their deaths.

"Dive into your pockets, and produce your treasures! Boys, look out for them, and don't miss a dollar, trinket, or tinker!"

The victims were now forced to stand in line.

Black Bob gazed keenly at the face of each, and an oath of disappointment burst from his lips.

Then he urged his horse to the side of the coach, and gazed inside. A fiendish laugh rung out, as he yelled:

"You're the same old coon, Major Malcolm, aren't you? Not changed an iota! Just you tumble out of your hiding-place, and join your pard in the line!"

The astonishment of the major had almost overpowered him, when he discovered the road-agents; and he was scarce able to totter from the stage, when thus addressed familiarly by the robber chief. He was the only man, who had escaped being dragged from the coach; the thought of the money he had upon his person ruling him to such an extent, that he had quickly drawn off his boots, and laid his bonds and greenbacks in them, in place of false soles which he cast aside.

Black Bob had detected him in this, and hence his exclamation.

The other passengers had been searched, and everything of value taken from them by the eager bandits; when, followed by the chief, Major Malcolm walked up and joined his companions.

"Throw the old duffer down, if he won't sit down! I'll act as his body servant, just this once, to please myself. Boys, I'm going to strike a bonanza—see if I don't!"

Major Malcolm quietly seated himself, and Black Bob instantly clutched his boots, one after the other, and, jerking them off, drew out from each a bundle of greenbacks, of large denomination, causing the bandits to yell, in their delight.

His watch and diamond pin were then taken from the old man, who only ground his teeth at the loss. The valuables were all taken charge of by Black Bob, who then yelled:

"Throw out the bag, Blucher, and we'll take it along! If there's an express-box, there ain't likely to be anything in it, coming this way—but stave it in! Gents, tumble into the coach!"

"One of you, empty your canteen on Rattling Rob's head, and bring him back to biz!"

These orders were given rapidly.

The burly bandit, on the coach, cast out the mail-bag and the express-box. Then, taking a canteen, passed him by one of his comrades, he poured the contents over the driver's head, soon

reviving him. Then the passengers got into the coach.

So strong in numbers were the outlaws, and so seemingly merciless, that their victims feared to utter a word. They were thankful that they were allowed to escape with their lives.

Rattling Rob, in a half-dazed state, climbed to his seat, at the orders of Black Bob, and took the reins and whip.

"Let go the nags, and mount your own horses, boys! Then follow. We'll guard the 'hearse,' or act as escort as far as the rise."

The next minute, the horses sprung forward, with loud snorts, and sped up the ascent.

Boulder City lay but a few thousand yards below them.

The bandit band galloped with the vehicle, eight outlaws on each side of coach and team, while Black Bob dashed on ahead, in the trail.

Thus they passed over the top of the rise, and into full view from the street of Boulder City.

Then the bandit chief ordered Rattling Rob to blow a merry blast on his bugle.

The citizens, eagerly awaiting for sounds to indicate the coming of the stage, rushed out from the hotels and shanties into the street.

Their amazement may be imagined when they saw the "hearse" rattling down the decline, and surrounded by a band of masked riders.

But soon these halted.

The stage dashed on and left them.

Then Black Bob circled his sombrero in the air, and, driving spurs, galloped back up the rise, followed by his band, each of whom fired a revolver at every bound of his horse, until every weapon was emptied.

Then Black Bob and his band of Bag-Slashers disappeared over the rise from the wondering view of the dumfounded denizens of Boulder City.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MAJOR'S MISERY.

THE astonishment of the citizens upon beholding the masked riders escorting the stage a portion of the way down the decline was beyond expression. Yet they strove to give vent to their feelings in outcries that created a perfect pandemonium in the street.

The dash of the road-agents on the back trail, firing as they galloped up the rise, was most impressive, and the citizens realized that a large band of outlaws had arrived, and were encamped in the vicinity—Black Bob being, doubtless, their chief.

When the stage was driven up to the stable, Rattling Rob was observed to be bleeding profusely from a wound in the head. His passengers were the most demoralized set of men in New Mexico.

They were penniless in a strange land, and far from any point from which they could obtain funds. It would take some time for them to receive money from their bankers; and meanwhile, how were they to live?

In a new mining-town all supplies are obtained only at an exorbitant price, and no proprietor of a public house is supposed to credit any one.

All had thought of this, immediately after discovering Boulder City below them, at the base of the grand towering mountains, within the bowels of which were, no doubt, gold and silver by millions, but useless as yet to man. The, for the present, ruined speculators gazed, one at the other, with expressions of face such as never before had marked their features.

Major Malcolm was, perhaps, the most furious among the number; although, were his funds available, he was in better condition financially than the others.

All were like shipwrecked mariners, on a desert island.

Only deep ejaculations of anger and fury were to be heard in the coach. Their feelings were too deep and hopeless for idle words.

In this condition they alighted at Boulder Hotel; and Pig Pretzel's red face and bead-like eyes flashed in the sun, as, bareheaded, he opened the coach door, and cried out:

"Goom ou-at ob dot, shentlemens! I regons you vos all clad to shump from dot stage. Gott in Himmel! Vare gooms from dose roat-achents? Tid dey dakes all your moneys?"

The passengers were covered with dirt, but the fineness and cut of their clothing proved their station in life; and little sympathy existed, in the hearts of the miners, for the high-toned speculators, who always made fortunes out of the discoveries of those who "roughed it," and who were, for want of capital, unable to engage in quartz mining.

Nevertheless the strangers were questioned until they were weary; and Long Horn prevailed upon them to cross the street to Booze Bazaar, and take a drink, agreeing to see them all right as to "grub" and sleeping quarters, for the day and night. If Boulder Bill had been present, Long Horn believed that he would have proffered every assistance to these most peculiarly-situated men.

But the former and the Man from Taos had disappeared, no one knew whither. Long

Horn, however, felt assured that they would soon show up.

Booze Bazaar was thus, by the cunning and foresight of its proprietor, crowded with citizens; all canvassing the daring robbery, the stage-driver being the hero of the hour. All the details were soon known, throughout the burg, and with many extravagant additions; and it was the unanimously-expressed opinion, that a sheriff should at once be elected—he to have full power to "boss the burg," and to institute a search for the bandits' head-quarters.

As this was proposed, Long Horn, sprung upon his bar, and cried out:

"I nom'nates Boulder Bill fer sheriff o' this hyer burg! Every pilgrim what's favor'ble, stan' whar he air, and every galoot what's ag'in' my new pard, glide out an' sociate hyerarter with Pig Pretzel!"

"Boulder Bill ain't in ther burg now, but he'll 'rove back 'fore soon—I'm gamblin' on that. I opine he's gone ter hunt fer sign o' Black Bob, whar he shooted his sombrero off las' night."

"Bully boyees! I see nary a galoot glide towards Pig Pretzel's shebang. Pard, Boulder Bill air 'lected sheriff o' this hyer slam-up burg; an' I'm ther slab-sided Texan what's sottin' 'em up fer him, ter wet his 'lection!"

The very building shook with the loud cheers for Boulder Bill, and the stamping of feet, followed by another round for Long Horn himself.

All this time Major Malcolm was in a most pitiable frame of mind.

His loss, through the forgeries of his clerk, had greatly worried him, and he had come to this far frontier, with the expectation of making good that loss by profitable investments. Instead of this, he had been robbed of ten thousand dollars—all he had with him, except a ten-dollar note, which he fortunately found, crumpled, in his vest pocket.

Fully as much worried, and terribly apprehensive, had he been on hearing himself addressed by name, by the bandit chief. He had been unable, as a matter of course, to explain this to his fellow passengers; for he had not the remotest idea who the robber was.

The passengers might have suspicions that he was connected with the outlaws, notwithstanding he had been himself robbed and ill-used, and had traveled in their company for so long a time. They might think him a bandit spy, and that this was the reason he had not been dragged out through the coach window, to the danger of life and limb.

These gloomy imaginings of the major were uncalled for; yet, for all that, they seemed real to him, in his demoralized condition.

This it was that caused him to steal away from the crowd, and again enter Boulder Hotel, where he was warmly welcomed by Pig Pretzel, who disgusted him greatly.

Securing a room, he sent a man to the stage for his trunk, and in a short time was engaged in penning a letter to his daughter, giving her a full account of his disagreeable situation, with details of the robbery—not forgetting to state that the bandit chief had addressed him by name.

The letter being finished, he sent for Rattling Rob, and stated his wants, requesting the driver to mail the letter at the main line station, and also to send telegrams from the nearest office; one to his banker for ten thousand dollars in greenbacks, to be forwarded immediately—the other to Maude, lest his letter would be too long on the road, or might not reach her at all.

The telegram to his daughter ran as follows:

"MAUDE MALCOLM, St. Louis, Mo.:—

"Follow me at once. Leave house in care of Dick. Bring with you twenty thousand dollars. Was robbed, almost in sight of destination; but will try to get along. Great opening here. Don't fail to start at once.

MUNROE MALCOLM,

"Boulder City, N. M."

This telegram to Maude would, doubtless, not have been sent, had not Black Bob thought of every expedient that was necessary to carry out his plot for vengeance.

He had, upon his first visit to Boulder City, a few hours previous to the arrival of Will Stone, been disguised as a man about the same age and appearance as Stanley Saunders, the old friend of the major, a photograph of whom Robertson had seen at the Malcolm mansion. It was through the letter he had written, purporting to be from Saunders, that Major Malcolm had been induced, as we have seen, to come to New Mexico.

Black Bob had then registered, as Stanley Saunders, on Pig Pretzel's register, and left a note to be delivered to Major Malcolm, on the arrival of the latter.

This the landlord recalled, upon observing the major's name, and he now delivered it.

It read thus:

"MY DEAR MAJOR:—

"I am leaving town in haste, and presume you will arrive during my absence. I go to examine a rich find, which can be bought cheap. Remain at Boulder Hotel until I return. Am sorry now I did not write you to bring more capital, for we can clear a fortune within a few months.

"In great haste.

"Your old friend,

"STANLEY SAUNDERS."

It was this letter that caused the major to telegraph, as has been stated.

He felt that there was no doubt that an immense fortune could soon be realized in Boulder City.

The coming of the coach-load of speculators to the town, all moneyed men, evidently, had been proof of this, confirming the written statement of his friend.

Again, he realized that it would be torture for him to remain in such low quarters; and that he would be lonesome and worried continually without his daughter, from whom he had never been long separated.

He therefore resolved to erect a cottage, as soon as he received funds, secure servants, and, with Maude for company, try and content himself until he and Saunders had gotten their grip on a bonanza mine.

All penurious men are extremely selfish, and Major Malcolm thought little of the dangers and discomforts of such a journey to his daughter, and the life she would be obliged to live after her arrival.

He thought only of himself.

The letter of the friend whom he had hoped to meet had banished somewhat the depression and gloom that his loss had occasioned.

Rattling Rob agreed to carry out the directions of the major, being greatly surprised, however, that, after his rough experiences, the latter should telegraph his daughter to come to Boulder City.

However, Rob reasoned that it was no business of his, so he made no comments.

This business having been gotten through with, Major Malcolm, who was thoroughly disgusted with the quarters assigned him, descended the stairs, got a lunch from Pig Pretzel—who, by the way, was in a most jubilant frame of mind, as he had received unharmed his beer and pretzels, which had been in the bottom of the "boot" of the stage.

After his lunch the major had a short conversation with his landlord, unnoticed by any one, and then strolled from the town toward the base of the range, and along the same. As he went he examined the rocks, as well as the sand in the beds of the mountain streamlets, with a critical eye.

For some distance he thus wandered, until at last, becoming weary from his fatiguing journey and want of sleep, he crawled, in a half somnolent state, into a pine *motte* and stretched himself upon the soft, leafy carpet, almost instantly dropping off into a deep slumber.

There Major Malcolm lay, until the dark shadows of night grew dense and more dense, enveloping the earth in Stygian darkness.

Soon after, the silvery moon arose, shooting darts of light into the *motte* of pines; and there, silent and motionless as a corpse, still lay Major Malcolm, in a deathlike slumber.

And, within the needle-like foliage of a pine-tree, crouched in the branches near the sleeping man, his snake-like eyes glaring upon the sleeper, was a hideous paint-daubed Apache; the three sable plumes, which flaunted from his head, proclaiming him a chief.

It was Red Eagle, the Renegade, who had guided Black Bob to the cavern in the bowels of the rocky range.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RENEGADE'S MISSION.

WHEN Major Malcolm delivered the letter and telegrams to Rattling Rob, it was in his own apartment in Boulder Hotel. The old man had used all the words he could bring to mind expressive of the importance of the messages; in particular promising the driver a suitable return for this favor, when his funds should arrive.

During that interview, incredible though it may seem, none other than the bandit chief had been present, in the disguise of a miner; that is, he was in the next apartment, separated from them merely by a cotton screen.

Black Bob could only with the greatest difficulty suppress a yell of joy and triumph, as he heard the major read the telegrams to Rattling Rob. The outlaw knew perfectly well that his old employer would at once write, or telegraph, for funds, as necessity compelled him to do so; but he had no idea that the major would, for a moment, think of sending for his daughter to come to that wild and dangerous border.

Black Bob had already partly prepared a letter, imitating the handwriting of Major Malcolm, intending to send it to Maude, for the express purpose of luring her to New Mexico. In this she was to be informed that her father lay very ill at Boulder City.

To mail his letter, and depend upon its accomplishing its purpose, would force the bandit chief to keep a constant espionage upon his victim, and prevent any letter, which either he or Boulder Bill might write to Maude, from being forwarded; for such epistles would "give him away."

Now, however, all was well.

The major had proved himself a most selfish and inconsiderate father, by sending for his beautiful and accomplished daughter, to leave her luxurious home, and join him in that rough

and wild region, where danger lurked at every step.

What the outlaw heard was almost too good to be true. He could hardly believe his senses.

Most certainly Satan seemed to be favoring his own, right straight along, in this plot.

Yet, right in the midst of this joy and exultation, occasioned by the words that he had overheard, there flashed a thought that almost took Black Bob's breath away.

This was neither more nor less than the presence of Boulder Bill in the burg.

Not before had the fact occurred to the arch-plotter, with the signification with which it was now considered. Indeed, he had been so occupied with acts and plans, studying this and that so entirely, that he had completely lost sight of the fact that Boulder Bill would meet Major Malcolm; and that the latter, under the difficulties by which he was surrounded, would, without doubt, be greatly rejoiced at meeting one whom he knew, and who had saved himself and daughter from death, on the River Rover.

Black Bob well knew that, although the young lady had become enamored with her preserver, her father knew nothing of it; and, what was more, she dared not tell him. This he had learned, while eavesdropping, at the arbor in St. Louis.

He also knew that Major Malcolm was the kind of man who would never give Will Stone a second thought, after rewarding him for his services.

From the fact that Will had left the Malcolm grounds, without entering the house to bid the major farewell, Black Bob felt positive that the young man had read the other's character; and that he avoided him, lest he might be insulted by the offer of a reward for the service he had rendered him. He would also, probably, spare Maude the pain such an interview would occasion her.

But when the two men would meet in the wilds of the Rocky Mountains, the major being without means, and half insane from his losses, they would be mutually rejoiced to meet. They would then confide in each other, and Boulder Bill would advance the funds to make the major comfortable, until a remittance should come to hand.

Not only this, but the young man would, without doubt, reason with the major upon the folly and unreasonableness of his having sent for Maude; and this would cause a telegram to be sent, countermanding the first. This reasoning, but too plain and conclusive to Black Bob, caused him to become almost frantic with rage, at his not having captured Boulder Bill, the previous night; which he might have done, by posting his men lower down the range.

He had felt assured that Bill would follow him in hot haste, when he yelled at him in Boulder City, calling him by name, and also mentioning Maude Malcolm. But his first object had been to gain possession of the letter, which the young man held in his hand, which he accomplished; and he had then drawn him on, in a chase after him, as he had previously planned. It was then, that he might have signaled his men, and gotten his rival in his power.

It was too late now, however, for regrets on that subject; but something still must be done to prevent the major and Boulder Bill from meeting.

This seemed impossible to Black Bob, but he waited, with hopes of something turning up to favor him; and with no little confidence of success, as he had been, thus far, so unaccountably favored.

It so happened, that the bandit chief, in the disguise mentioned, left his room, sauntered into the street, and kept his eye on Major Malcolm, until the latter left the town, and wandered up the range.

A fiendish triumph ruled Black Bob, as he saw this.

The "devil's own luck" still clung to him.

Following the major at a distance, the outlaw saw him crawl into the pine *motte*, lie down, and fall into a deep slumber.

Taking into consideration the long and fatiguing journey the old man had traveled, Bob felt sure that he would sleep for some hours. He, therefore, proceeded to a thicket, in which he had secreted his horse, hastily mounted, and galloped, screened from the view of the denizens of Boulder City, up the range, to the great gulch, and his cavern retreat.

Upon arriving thither, the chief immediately dispatched Red Eagle, the Apache renegade, on the back trail to find and watch the major, until the latter should awaken. He was then to capture him and bring him into the cave.

The Indian scorned all directions, except the distance up the range from the town, at which the old man lay. He then started on his mission without the bandit chief's having noticed that the red man had been drinking, for their conference was held in the dimly lighted passage to the little mount-enclosed valley.

Had Black Bob seen the Indian after the latter reached the gulch and daylight, he would have had little confidence as to the success of the savage's mission; for out from Red Eagle's quiver, amid the arrows, projected the neck of

a black bottle. The eyes of the Indian, too, were unusually wild, and his gestures at imaginary followers were simply ludicrous.

Black Bob, however, had so much business on his hands that he had not paid particular attention to the voice of the Apache, or called him into the light, to assure himself that his red spy and follower was sober. This he would have done had his mind been less burdened: for Red Eagle was exceedingly fond of "fire-water," and it was that that made him what he was—a renegade from his tribe.

That which had worried the outlaw chief most was the fact that he had been forced to disguise himself, and enter Boulder City at once, upon reaching the cave, and this without having divided the proceeds of the stage robbery among his men.

He had not thought of this until he reached the burg; but then, and since then, he had been on thorns; for he feared that his followers would, after their first and very successful attempt as a band, celebrate by a too great indulgence in whisky. This would probably occasion grumbling, if not threats, discontent and mutiny, at being, even for a few hours, deprived of the privilege of handling the wealth they had so suddenly gained.

To bind his men more closely to him, Black Bob had promised that the proceeds of the first robbery should be equally shared by all; he, himself, claiming no more than Sleepy Sim, the cave-keeper.

Upon reaching the little vale, the chief found his suspicions correct in one respect, for the band were feasting and drinking. But they welcomed him with rousing cheers, which satisfied him that he had returned in time.

Immediately he set about dividing the money that had been taken from the speculators, which had been a rich haul, amounting to several thousand each. He then slashed open the mail-bag, opening only such letters as he thought might have inclosures. There was no money worth speaking of in either the mail-bag, or the express-box. But, to the great joy of Black Bob, he found three letters addressed to Will Stone, and all in the hand of Maude Malcolm.

These he tore open, unfolding them to show his men there was no money in them, and then, placed them in his pocket, for future examination.

The mail was returned to the bag, and one of the bandits was ordered to take it to Boulder City, and leave it on the stage-seat, during the small hours, when there was no danger of discovery. Having got through his business, Black Bob climbed up the side of the mountain, and entering the cavern, repaired to his private cave-chamber, and threw himself upon his couch, completely beat out with fatigue, and privation from sleep.

But, though feeling thus, he could not banish from his mind how wonderfully successful he had been; the Fates seeming to have ordered that everything should run smoothly, toward the successful culmination of his plot and vengeance.

No fact struck him more forcibly in this connection, than the absence of Boulder Bill from the burg, when the stage had arrived; and that absence being protracted until all had turned out as he wished—Major Malcolm having wandered from the town, to be overcome with sleep in the *motte*, and thus fall into captivity, through Red Eagle, the Renegade.

Dimly and indistinctly, wavered in the mind of Black Bob, a suspicion, an apprehension, as to the success of the Apache.

Should he fail, all would be ruined!

The bandit chief strove to throw off the drowsiness that weighed him down, but in vain. He could not move a muscle. His lids drooped over his eyes, and a deathlike sleep overcame him.

CHAPTER XIX.

VIEWING THE PROMISED LAND.

BOWLER BILL and the Man from Taos proceeded down the range, amid the huge bowlders between the foot-hills; the latter gazing intently at each feature of the landscape, at times striking his mule upon the shoulder, causing the animal to halt. Then he would cover his eyes with one hand, and scratch his hair-tangled cranium with the other; as if endeavoring to recall some indistinct, dream-like scene or occurrence, which indeed he was.

Although the appearance of Bug-Juice Bill was miserable and vagabondish in the extreme, the mule corresponding with its rider, and both forming a picture as comical as it was wretched, Boulder Bill saw no cause to smile; just the opposite indeed, for his sympathy and pity for the man overpowered all else.

Yet, not for a moment did our young friend doubt the word of the miserable man who accompanied him; firmly believing that he had found the rich specimen of ore near at hand.

Into, up, and out from, gulch after gulch, toward the heart of the range, amid the wildest and most startling mountain scenery, the young man followed his strange guide, penetrating the darkest and narrowest passages; the Man from Taos often halting bewildered, and vainly striving to gain a view of some outline

in the scenes before him, to correspond with the surroundings of the "locate," in which he had, while in a half insane state, found the bonanza.

Never a word spoke either—Bug-Juice Bill, at times made gestures of caution, silence, and hope; strangely mingled with doubt and regret upon his sunburnt and blistered face, while his blue eyes strove to express the full assurance of success to Boulder Bill.

Always, upon realizing that he was in the wrong gulch, but only after having penetrated a considerable distance, he would give vent to his disappointment in a furious growl, and then take a couple of swallows of liquor; making at the same time a grimace of disgust and self-condemnation, raising his clinched fist to the bottle, and then returning it to his pocket. He would then strike his broad breast, while suffering was plainly imprinted upon his features.

Thus time passed, both ever watchful at all points; Boulder Bill being forced at last to decide, in his own mind, that it was very doubtful about his most strange and strangely met pard ever again coming across his lost "find."

Nearly the whole day was spent in this manner, and yet they had not gone two miles down the range from Boulder City, in a straight course. Frequent consultations now passed between the pair. Boulder Bill advised a return to the burg, but the Man from Taos was obstinate and determined. He seemed, at each fresh disappointment, to be more than ever resolved to continue on, showing a remarkable perseverance, which gained the admiration of his companion, and kept his hope and confidence from dying out.

Finally, when the sun was low in the west, the pair entered a dark ravine, so narrow that certainly not more than four horsemen could have ridden along its bed abreast; the rock walls towering, rough and rugged, skyward, to a great height, and almost perpendicular.

After passing some distance along this dark and dreary passage, Bug-Juice Bill suddenly halted, and his pard was soon by his side.

One look at the dimly lighted features of the Man from Taos revealed the fact to Boulder Bill that his strange guide had made a favorable discovery. Following with his eye the direction that the stranger pointed out, our young friend saw a great mass of vines, much tangled, hanging from afar up the rocks from two dwarf cedars; the roots of one of which clung to the wall on either side, while they bent toward each other, their branches mingling, thus forming an arch. From this a huge serpent-like vein depended, at the end of which was the mass of smaller tangled vines, with their foliage. These swayed slowly back and forth, like the pendulum of a clock, caused by the current of air through the dark, narrow cleft.

Silently, for a moment, Bug-Juice Bill sat his mule, pointing significantly ahead at this peculiar and noticeable scene, so weird, and wild, and natural, yet seeming as though it had been arranged by the hand of man.

Then a low chuckle of relief and exultation burst from the Man from Taos, as he said, in a low, impressive, and confident tone:

"Come on, pard Bill! I've struck ther trail et last. I've seed that thing afore, dead sure an' sart in. Ther's plain sign, an' what I've bin scratchin' my cabase ter recommember. Come on, fer our bonanza!"

"If you've seen that peculiar picture before, I'm inclined to think you're on the right trail," returned Boulder Bill, much relieved; "for I don't believe that any man unless he was drunk or crazy, or both, would venture into this infernal hole. Drive on—I'm with you!"

And on they went; the dark, narrow ravine winding serpent-like, the darkness deepening, and hope again beginning to wane with Boulder Bill. He feared that Bug-Juice Bill had been mistaken after all, and that he was now relapsing into his previous disordered mental condition.

But, suddenly, a grayish light was seen ahead as they turned a rocky point; this light brightening as they proceeded. Bug-Juice Bill uttered a cry of joy and confidence.

Many strange scenes had the pair witnessed since they began their search, but there had been none to equal that which broke upon their view, as they emerged from the narrow ravine they had so long followed; for they found themselves in a beautiful little grass-grown valley, of not more than an acre in extent, and surrounded by towering walls of rock. There seemed no exit or entrance, other than the dark ravine they had followed.

The peaks on the east side were gilded by the setting sun; seeming, as the mica-flecked masses reflected the rays of the red god of day, like mounts peaked with virgin gold. For the time, as Boulder Bill thought, they reflected on their surface the riches of their adamantine hearts.

For a full minute, Bug-Juice Bill swept, with keen gaze, the entire walls of the vale, at their base; when, all at once, he threw up his hands, and gave a wild whoop; while his mule, with a snort and a toss of the head, its long ears flopping, shot to the south side of the mountain oasis, and disappeared in a small clump of dark green pines.

Boulder Bill sprung from his horse, and,

leading the animal, proceeded toward the same point; but avoiding the course which the mule had taken, and examining the sward, which was soft, and the grass rich and tender.

Soon he halted, and stooped to inspect the sod.

There, plainly imprinted, was a trail—the trail of a mule—the hoof-marks being the same size as those of the animal of Bug-Juice Bill. No longer was there any doubt in his mind, in regard to the Man from Taos having been in the little vale before.

He now hastened to the little *motte* of pines, and entered the same; after slipping the bridle of his horse, to allow the animal to feed. The mule of his strange pard brushed past him, on its way to join the horse, and to graze.

"Halloo! where are you, pard?"

Thus cried out Boulder Bill.

There was no answer.

Our young friend rushed through the pines, toward the base of the towering rock walls; the pines growing close up to the same, and their branches brushing against the cliff.

Here and there Boulder Bill groped, at length discovering a small, cave-like opening.

Into this he bounded.

Far ahead he saw the weird, fantastic figure of Bug-Juice Bill with a flaming torch in his hand.

This was only for a moment, for the Man from Taos disappeared, as did the light from his torch.

Boulder Bill was puzzled and indignant.

Had his strange pard gone crazy?

So, indeed, it appeared.

At once the young man sprung back into the *motte*, procured a pine-knot, ignited it, and again entered the cave. Hastening to the point where he had last seen the Man from Taos, ten thousand scintillations, diamond-like, reflected the light of his torch from the walls and arched roofs of the great rock chambers.

Turning to the right and winding in the same direction, holding his torch behind him, he discovered the glow from the pine-knot of his pard and hastened forward.

The Man from Taos had thrust his torch into a crack in the wall, low down and next to the floor of the cavern upon which he sat, his eyes fixed, his dexter hand pointing in front of him to a spot some three feet from the base of the wall.

There the rough rock showed signs of its having been recently broken.

Near him lay pick, spade and hammer, also his own and his mule's outfit—all left when, in his half-insane state from drink, he had discovered the rich outcroppings and hastened from the cave, forgetting his personal property, and only eager to find a pard to work that lonesome mine in the bowels of the mountain. The cave doubtless seemed, in his demoralized imagination, to be peopled with terrible fiends; whose shrieks, and clammy touch, and horrible eyes, hastened his flight from the cavern.

Then he had sunk into a lethargy, near to death, yet had clung to his faithful mule, which had carried him in safety to Boulder City. And there he had met a pard after his own heart—Boulder Bill.

The latter now sunk down by the side of the Man from Taos, who held out his hand.

Hands and eyes and glances spoke louder than words; for, before them was plainly to be seen the outcroppings of a vein of gold, as rich as the specimen which Bug-Juice Bill had carried with him.

The Man from Taos sprung to his feet, seized his pick, and, like a madman, hacked the gold-bearing quartz, the rich lumps flying on every side of Boulder Bill.

The strength of a score of men seemed to be in his brawny arms; but suddenly the implement fell with a clang from his nerveless hands to the rock floor, and he sunk limp upon the cold stone himself. Looking into the face of his pard, he broke out in a voice that sounded strange and unnatural:

"Take hit all—Boulder Bill! Fer ye're young, an' han'some, an' squar', an' white! Yer'll make good use of hit, but hit's woss than nothin' ter Bill Bentley, since Nannie an' ther leetle boy war scalped an' hacked by ther red bellyuns!"

"Blow my brains out, an' drag me inter a hole, pard, fer I wants ter go ter Nannie an' my boy! I bain't never gambled much on bein' good, but I've suffered a heap; an', mebbe so, He"—pointing upward—"ther good Father what made me, may be willin' ter let me go somewhar near, whar I kin see them ag'in!"

Lower and lower sunk the voice of the Man from Taos, lower and lower sunk his head upon his breast; his lids drooped, and then closed, his hands were clasped about his knees.

Boulder Bill stirred not.

He sat there, before that mine of gold so brilliant, beneath walls that glittered with myriads of seeming jewels—riches beyond compute, were without doubt in those rock-walls—yet, gorgeous and brilliant though they were, extravagant and magnificent as were the mind-pictures conjured up by the gold before him, Boulder Bill knew that the Man from Taos was gazing upon a far brighter and more heavenly one—

"Nannie an' ther leetle boy," among the angels!

A merciful Father had permitted him, in his dreams, to look in upon his murdered wife and child; showing him a picture, that would banish in part, the fearful agony of heart and soul, which at times rendered him—giant in form and strength though he was—as helpless as an infant.

CHAPTER XX.

TAKEN CAPTIVE.

RED EAGLE stalked slowly and proudly down the great gulch, having stopped in the pine *motte* to take a few swallows of the fiery liquor he had brought with him. Here and there amid the boulders and pines he glided, until he neared the point at which Black Bob had told him he would find the white man whom he must watch and capture.

The outlaw chief had been positive that no one had noticed the departure of Major Malcolm from the hotel; consequently he had no anxiety in regard to the old man's being discovered while he slept, as no person, even passing quite near the pines, would be liable to notice him.

Crawling like a snake, the Apache searched each clump of trees and bushes, practicing unnecessary caution; he, in his half-intoxicated state, imagining himself in great danger, and surrounded by vengeful foes.

But a little time passed when the Indian uttered a grunt of satisfaction, striking his paint-daubed breast, while his piercing black eyes darted glances of suspicion toward all points; for, before him, and not ten feet from his position, lay Major Malcolm upon his back, his arms thrown carelessly on the sward, all strewn with pine needles.

The major was wrapped in a profound slumber.

The long journey, with but brief snatches of sleep, and those taken in an uncomfortable position, had told upon the old ex planter; and now that he lay upon so soft a bed, and with so much freedom as to room and position, he not only slept soundly, but his slumbers promised to continue for some time.

From the fact, that not a muscle in his frame moved, except those which the heart and lungs controlled, in their natural and regular action, an observer would judge that the major would not be easy to awaken; and that, of his own accord, it would be a long time before he would arouse himself.

Satisfied as to this, the Apache stole silently up into the dense branches and foliage above his intended captive; there ensconcing himself comfortably, and sitting immovable as a statue. There he waited and watched in stolid patience.

But all things have an end, and so had the long vigil of Red Eagle; but, not until midnight spread her dark mantle on the earth, and hid from view the towering peaks of the Rockies, far above the pines, amid which lay Major Malcolm and sat the Apache renegade. And, not even then, did the Indian pounce upon his intended captive. He slid silently from his perch to the earth, drank from his bottle, and waited for the rising of the moon.

Not long was the earth shrouded in darkness. Soon the bright, silvery moon smiled placidly down upon the earth—alike on far-off cities, in so-called civilization, and upon the wild mountains and wilder men of the border.

What would have been the emotions that would have ruled the fair and gentle Maude Malcolm, could she have been gifted with the power of flight, and thus enabled to look down upon the rocky range near Boulder City?

Three scenes would have met her view which would have tortured her beyond endurance.

First, she might have seen Robert Robertson, or Black Bob, sleeping in his cavern and surrounded by a horde of brutal bandits. Secondly, her father, stretched in that wild spot amid the pines, with a hideous Indian about to pounce upon him. And, lastly, Will Stone, or Boulder Bill, reclining upon the floor of a cavern; the flaming torches revealing a gigantic man near him, a most miserable object, who, she could scarce help believing, must be a lawless desperado, who was now holding her lover captive!

A mercy it was, that Maude Malcolm could neither see nor know any thing of this; for her heart was heavily weighted with sorrow as it was, at the absence of both father and lover. She hoped and prayed that they might be brought together, there on that wild border, in such a manner as to cause her parent to see and appreciate the worth of Will.

We must now return, however, to Red Eagle and the major.

No sooner had the moon darted arrows of her silver light into the pine *motte*, than the Apache took from his pouch a stout cord of some length, and a wad of buckskin.

Laying aside his bow and quiver and taking particular care to place his bottle of whisky in a secure place, the Indian hesitated not a moment.

Immediately he pounced upon the sleeping major and thrust the buckskin wad into his mouth, pressing down his lower jaw for the purpose, to a painful degree; for the muscles of the sleeper were strengthened by wakefulness.

Then, as the old man's eyes opened, starting in terror and horror, the savage jerked him over upon his face and bound his wrists tightly behind him.

With a guttural ejaculation of triumph, Red Eagle then lifted the major to his feet, and retaining the end of the cord in his grasp, and reslinging his quiver and bow to his back, he caught up his bottle of whisky, thrust it into his quiver again and pointed outward from the *motte*, saying:

"White man walk fast. Red Eagle great chief. Mebbe so kill quick. Mebbe so torture."

And the Indian enforced his command by pricking his captive in the calf of the leg, with his scalping-knife. The poor old man staggered, trembling as if stricken with an ague-fit, out from the *motte*.

He knew not, in his terror and bewilderment, in which direction Boulder City was situated; and, even had he done so, the knowledge would not have benefited him.

Words cannot express what the captive now felt.

All his previous troubles and experiences, taken together, were as nothing in comparison to the position in which he now found himself.

He had never seen a hostile Indian chief. He had not supposed that there was one anywhere near Boulder City; but this fiend, well armed and in the hideous paint and feathers, the sense of the major told him—must be on the war-path.

He had heard of Apache outrages and massacres in New Mexico, and that that tribe was the most bloodthirsty, merciless and brutal of any upon the American continent—not excepting the Sioux.

This savage who had captured him must be an Apache.

If so, his fate was sealed.

A horrible death awaited him!

Then it was that Major Malcolm felt he must have been insane, to have come to the Rocky Mountains; and more so, to have telegraphed his daughter to join him.

And Maude would come.

Well he knew that she would start at once.

What, then, would be her fate?

Perhaps she would be robbed by bandits, as he had been; or worse, captured and condemned to a fate, to which death would be a mercy in comparison.

All this was terrible.

To do the major justice we must record of him that his selfishness was now banished; that now, as he believed death drew near, he felt more agony of mind in regard to his child, than for himself.

On, up the range, the hideous Apache in his front, and keeping the cord taut, tottered poor Major Malcolm; overpowered by dread, despair and self condemnation.

Naught but disaster had been his lot since he had fallen asleep on board the ill-fated River Rover, to awaken amid hissing steam, black smoke that was stifling, and lurid forked flames.

And, as the major thought of this, he deeply regretted not having insisted upon the brave young man, the rescuer of his daughter and himself, visiting him to receive his heartfelt thanks. As he thought thus he berated himself for having sent a pecuniary recompense for such a service, realizing that a man who would risk his life to save the lives of others would be insulted by the offer of payment for so doing.

Believing that death was near, the scales fell from the major's eyes, and he felt that he had brought his fate upon himself; that, through his inordinate love of riches, when all the while he had an abundance of this world's goods, he had sacrificed his life, and perhaps that of his only child.

The brain of the old man seemed to be burning, and several times he came near falling to the earth, as some more torturing thought shot like a white-hot shaft of steel through his demoralized brain.

Not half-way up the range to the gulch had Red Eagle marched with his captive, when he turned into a narrow ravine, which led inward toward the heart of the range. This, soon after became a steep ascent, which eventually brought them out into a huge circular cavity, or basin in the rocks, which was illumined by the moon, but surrounded by towering walls, much lower, however, toward the east.

Near the center of this basin stood the dead stump of a tree, devoid of bark, bleached white, and to this the Apache bound his terrified captive, now almost prostrated by fatigue.

The major's hat was gone, his gray hair was hanging to his shoulders, and his face was the hue of death.

Red Eagle quickly threw aside his bow and quiver, taking his bottle and drinking liberally. He then placed it to the mouth of his captive, forcing the major to drink likewise. This act gave the latter hope, where no hope had previously existed, but that feeling was banished at the words which followed from his captor's lips:

Pale-face drink fire-water. Make heap strong. Then torture long time. Pale-face he old squaw. Red Eagle he chief, Apache chief. It is good.

Want scalp. Scalp white. Good scalp for shield.

Drinking once more, the savage placed the bottle in a secure hiding-place, and then, clutching the bow and arrows, jerked the gag from the mouth of the major and ran some twenty paces. Then, whirling quickly, with a wild whoop, he let fly two of the deadly shafts directly at the head of his victim, the arrows tearing through the old man's flowing hair, close to his ears.

A shriek of mortal terror shot from the trembling captive, which caused a yell of disdain and contempt from the Apache, who then threw aside his bow and quiver, jerked his scalping-knife and hatchet, and bounded, with the torture-song ringing tauntingly and weapons brandished in the air—a picture most hellish to behold—directly toward the wretched Major Malcolm, his tomahawk upraised to crash through the old man's brain!

This was more than the unfortunate captive could bear.

It was fiendishly horrible.

Must he be launched thus into eternity, without even a moment for prayer?

The major's head fell upon his breast.

All consciousness had been mercifully taken from him.

His overtaxed brain had given way.

With a grunt of disdain and contempt, Red Eagle, half-bent, and with feathers flaunting, danced, with a spasmodic hop and bound, around the senseless man, chanting the torture song of his people.

And, down upon that hellish scene, in that wild cavity in the rocky range, the silvery moon smiled placidly upon the senseless, bowed gray head at the stake, and the paint-daubed and feather-bedizened savage, whose long black hair flew wildly about his bronzed frame, in that devilish dance, and whose weird chant echoed amid the clefts and crags, afar up the towering peaks!

CHAPTER XXI.

CONFIDENCE FOR CONFIDENCE.

Long sat Bug-Juice Bill, his hands covering his face, and his strong frame trembling at times; as, in fancy, he gazed again at the mutilated forms of his wife and child, and then saw them, in the blissful realms, and at rest.

How often had he, in his terrific fury, with an insane longing to fulfill the oath of vengeance he had sworn over the mangled remains of "Nannie an' ther kid," hurled himself among the merciless slayers of his loved ones, laying them low; numbers of them shrinking in superstitious horror, before his mad rush, that spread death in his trail broadcast—be, himself, seeking the death that was denied him, when others fell by his side, under the Apache arrows!

All this, Boulder Bill realized from what had been told him by Long Horn, and from the manner and expressions of the Man from Taos himself.

So deeply was our young friend affected by his sympathy for his strange pard, although he was at a loss in what way to express it, that, for a time, even the gold bonanza that lay in front of him—the prospective fortune, which was to place him on an equality with the maiden whom he loved—even this was forgotten.

The silent grief of this uncouth sufferer was too sacred for him to break in upon; and Boulder Bill stole silently away, with one of the torches, which he placed at the turn from the main passage, and then made his way to the outer air.

Removing the equipments from his horse, he staked the animal in the midst of the rich rank grass, and selecting some food from his saddlebags, returned to Bug-Juice Bill, saying:

"Pard, come now, and join me in a lunch; and then, you can lie down, and have a sleep. We shall have to camp here to-night, but I reckon Boulder City won't 'bu'st up' in our absence."

"I'm your friend, remember that, and to the death; and I was before you confided in me. In fact, I was drawn toward you, when I saw the sad state you were in. That was why I woke up Long Horn, for I felt anxious about you all night."

The Man from Taos did not move a muscle or change his position; but, at the last words from his companion, a choking sob escaped him.

Bill said nothing more but placed the food in readiness and waited patiently.

Soon his strange pard arose and extended his hand, saying, in a tone that proved the sincerity of his words:

"Boulder Bill, listen ter me! I hedn't no doubt afore ther yer war anythin' 'ceptin' a fust-class man; but I sw'ar yer 'pears ter me jest now to be more'n a man. Leastways, ye're a ormighty sight diffrunt from any pilgrim I ever run ag'in afore. Nobuddy ever spoke sich words ter me afore, an' they war jest what I needed, though I didn't know hit, nor think I'd ever hear 'em."

"Yer c'u'dn't ha' left out a single one. I

needed 'em all, but no more; fer thar ain't no more in any lingo ther 'u'd fit my case better, I knows."

"Hit's ormighty strange, I tuck ter yer from ther fust time I got my peepers onto yer, though I war purty nigh lunified. Ef thar bees such a thing possible fer sperits o' ther dead ter control ther livin', an' sometimes I opines thar bees, why Nannie an' ther kid must ha' brunged us together."

"I'm glad you think so, pard," said Will. "Let us act as though it was, or is so, and we'll be all right."

"Dang'd ef we won't pard! An' ther pilgrim what bucks ag'in' you, will lay low mighty suddint."

"I'm goin' ter take yer advice ez fur ez I kin, an' not 'low whik' ter get ther best o' me. I'm Bill Bentley, but they call me Bug-Juice Bill ever since ther 'Paches broke me up. Yer know how hit war did."

"But I'll prove ter 'em that it hain't no 'properate cog. I'll be a man! Fac' air, I must be, ef I pard with ther like o' you. I ain't goin' ter disgrace yer, er make yer 'shamed o' yer pard. I said I didn't keer a dang fer ther gold I've struck. I takes hit back, fer hit'll gi'n me a show ter hold up my head wif' ther best on 'em, an' be equil with you in 'bout all 'ceptin' lingo."

"Nannie war allers wishin' I'd 'strike it rich,' sayin' I war cut out fer somethin' better than ther gin'ral run o' pilgrims what I 'sociated with. I'll spruce up fer her sake, an' ther little boy's an' yourn. Mebbe so they kin see me even hyar 'mong ther rocks."

"Boulder Bill, I'm yer pard, until I takes my last kick, flops over, an' goes whar I kin at least take a peep, onc't in a while, ef Nannie an' ther kid. I means hit every word!"

"I believe you, Bill Bentley; and you do not know how relieved and pleased your words have made me. The kind Fates have brought us together, I believe, for our own mutual good."

"Bright prospects are before us, I trust; indeed there seems little doubt of it at all. I have much to tell you in regard to myself when we have time. If you can keep in the same frame of mind in which you are now, it will be worth more to you than all the gold we may be able to get out of this, even if it proves, as we have good reason to believe, a remarkable bonanza."

"The whisky you have drank of late has greatly injured you; but you'll soon recover your natural state of mind. I honestly believe that you owe your life to your mule. You would have died here, or in the ravine, had not that sagacious animal found its way with you to Boulder City."

"Ye're right, pard; an' ther mule shell live in clover hyerarter. I'll not ride him ag'in arter I gets XXX. He's ther bestest anermile on ther range, er cff hit; an' he knows more'n half ther humans. Hit 'u'd ha' bin dreadful ef I'd draw'd my last breathe drunk—chuck-full o' bug-juice—an' hit skeers me ter think o' hit; fer I heard a Bible-thumper say onc't ther hit 'u'd be a easier job ter make a charge on a mustang through ther eye o' a needle, then ter git nigh ther good place ef yer flopped over ther range when ye war full o' booze."

"Howsomers, I don't undercomstan' how he sh'ud know anythin' 'bout hit, bein's he's never bin thar; ner ther humans what writes books 'bout hit, neither. But le's fodder, pard! I sw'ar I feels like another man, since we-urs struck gold, an' me solid sense, by yer senserble lingo."

"I am more than glad to hear you say so, Bentley. We will eat, and then you must lie down and sleep. I will stretch out myself, but I have so much to think of, I do not expect to sleep."

The two men then seated themselves upon the rock floor, and began to eat.

"What's botherin' yer, pard?" asked Bug-Juice Bill, with earnestness; "we're pards in ther bonanza, in trouble, an' everythin' else. Don't fergit ter recommender ther!"

"All right, Bill! We all have troubles, and we should share them. My present difficulty is more of the perplexing order; in fact, it is mysteriously strange and unaccountable."

"Spit her out!"

"I'll do so!"

Will Stone then related his experiences since reaching Boulder City, dwelling particularly upon the points which most troubled him—namely, the stealing of his letter to Maude Malcolm, and the words which were yelled at him by the bandit chief, Black Bob.

This necessitated, also, the detailing of the steamboat disaster; his connection with the same, and the love that sprung up between Maude and himself; this last having been the cause of his starting for the mines, in quest of fortune.

Everything, in short, was explained.

The Man from Taos listened intently, weighing every word. He pondered a moment, and then spoke:

"I never heerd o' sich a hand es called thar-selves ther Bag-Slashers, er of Black Bob either. Bet yer life, they're a fresh crowd o' agents, an' ther thar chief what stoled ther letter, an'

yelped at yer, hev follered yer from ther States!

"I'm gamblin' hefty be war soft on ther lady hisself, an' she throwed him off. Then ther cuss, findin' she war dead gone on yeou, swore ter bu'st hit up, by wipin' yer out; an' then he'd stand a show, fair er foul, ter corral her."

"Thet's hit, shore es yer borned, pard! But we'll gi'n him a merry ruffle o' fun, ef he doesn't keep clear o' us. Black Bob, be durned! We'll salerwate him, an' his hull lay-out. Hit 'u'd be fun ter hang 'em up et ther eend o' a lariat."

"Hit ain't s'prisin', howsomever, thet a crowd o' agents hev showed up, nigh on ter Boulder City; fer they allers does when a payin' 'strike' hev bin made, an' a burg 'slapped up.' But, ef these air green et ther biz, they won't last long on ther range. I kin asserwate thet—specially might thet burg, what's gut a heap o' bad 'cits' inter hit, Long Horn says; bad ter buck ag'in', I means."

"But, le's lay ourselves out fer a snooze. Don't 'low Black Bob's lingo ter keep a wink o' sleep from yer. He can't do no harm ter ther lady, what's et St. Louis; an' we 'uns doesn't keer a cuss fer forty Black Bobs."

"I'll try to sleep, pard; but there is something so strange and mysterious about that bandit chief, that it bothers me. He must have spies in the burg, you see."

"And what did he mean, by saying that he would come for Miss Malcolm, after corraling her father, and then for me? He could have very easily killed me, had I gone to bed, when the letter was returned; for I should have slept very soundly."

"You see, he risked his life to gain that letter. I should have shot his horse, and captured him, had not the chamber of the revolver just been emptied. He is an enemy to me and mine, and an enemy to guard against; although, I am positive, I do not know him. But I must solve the riddle."

"Black Bob must be captured, and by me; and I'll torture him, until he explains his strange words and actions."

"Don't yer fret about him, pard! We'll salerwate, scarify, an' toast him, until he 'splains everything. We'll fotch him hyer, an' fix his flint."

"I hope we may be so successful, Bentley. But, I'll bother you no more. Go to sleep, pard; and I'll try to do the same. We must return to the burg to-morrow morning. You must get a new rig, take a bath, have your hair cut, and a shave; and then, we'll see how the land lies, and pitch into biz lively."

"You have discovered a bonanza, most certainly; and we must keep the knowledge of it to ourselves, or the 'find' will be of little benefit to us. Good-night, now, and pleasant dreams!"

"Good-night, pard; an' may yer sleep be es sweet es a baby's. Ter ther dickens wi' Black Bob! He'll be black in ther face, when we 'uns run him up a limb. We'll show him he can't bob 'roun' this section o' ther range. We'll swing ther condemned cuss, higher'n Gilderoy's kite!"

"He deserves it, beyond a doubt," returned Boulder Bill.

Here the conversation closed.

All became silent in the cave.

Bag Juice Bill sunk at once into the arms of Morpheus.

Will seemed to be asleep, but he was not.

The words of the bandit chief rung in his ears.

Upon them the young man dwelt long in thought, but he came no nearer to a solution of the strange enigma.

Had he known what was then transpiring, but a short distance up the range—had he known that Major Malcolm, whom he believed to be in St. Louis, was being dragged along, bound and gagged by an Apache, his amazement would have been very greatly increased.

Well was it, for the peace of Boulder Bill's mind, that he knew nothing of the villainous plot that had been laid by Major Malcolm's ex-clerk—now the outlaw chief, the leader of the Bag-Slashers!

Little dreamed he of the real identity of Black Bob, the forger and outlaw, who had sworn to slay him and Major Malcolm, and force Maude to be his cringing, dishonored slave.

CHAPTER XXII.

SAVED FROM THE TORTURE.

WHEN Black Bob awoke in his cave-chamber, he sprang at once to a sitting posture. He knew that he had had a long sleep, and collecting his thoughts, he recalled the fact that he had dispatched Red Eagle to capture and bring Major Malcolm to the cave.

If the Apache had failed in his mission, all was lost. Boulder Bill would meet the major in the burg, and the telegram would not be sent to Maude.

With an oath, the outlaw chief sprang to his feet.

He saw the sleeping forms of some of his band in the main cavern. Rushing along the passage, and lifting a corner of the blanket screen, he gazed out into the great gulch.

It was night.

The moon was shining brightly.

All was still in the gulch.

Below were the horses of the band, listlessly cropping the grass.

Monkey Mose stood at the entrance to the long arched passage, the outlet of the little valley.

The branches of the pines whisked by Black Bob's side, and the rifle of Big Buck gleamed through the same, pointed at his breast.

The huge bandit, in a growling voice, cried out:

"Sling yer cog, er I'll bore yer!"

"Hold up, Buck!" yelled the chief; "you ought to know that no stranger could be here, unless he passed through the cave from the gulch entrance. Where, in Satan's name, is Red Eagle?"

"Hain't see'd him, Cap, since yer come in yesterday arfternoon," was the reply.

"Devil take that Apache! I sent him after a captive, and he ought to have been here half an hour after moonrise. If the cuss don't succeed, we'll lose more ducats than we raked in at the 'hearse.' Rouse up some of the least boozey of the men, and send them down lively!"

"We'll have to hunt that infernal red. Hang him, if he has played us false, I'll skin him alive!"

Down the steep path rushed Black Bob, past his sleeping followers, crying out to Monkey Mose, although he well knew the Indian had not returned:

"Mose, has that blasted red-skin come back?"

"Nary time, cap'n! Ther or'nary cuss hain't showed hisself since yer come in. He war actin' sorter queer all day. Didn't yer see how he war fixed up?"

"I didn't see him at all, for I met him in the passage where it was too dark to notice his make up. What do you mean?"

"Why, he war painted right smart, hed on his new rig, feathers an' all; 'sides his bow an' arrers war slung onto his back."

"That looks bad surely! Did the boys give him any whisky?"

"Not more'n a drink er two, I reckon; but he mought hev corral'd a bottle on the sly."

"Blast the greasy, treacherous cuss! I'll fix him!"

With these words, Black Bob rushed for his horse; yelling for the equipments to Big Buck, who stood at the edge of the pine motte.

The chief then observed several of his band coming down hastily.

"Saddle up, all of you, lively, and follow me!" he yelled, as he came running to the passage entrance, his horse trotting at his side.

Without a word the half-dozen bandits, ashamed of having drank too much, saddled their horses as quickly as they could.

Big Buck arrived with the equipments of the chief; and, in two minutes more Black Bob emerged from the dark passage into the gulch, followed by his little squad; all speeding down the gulch-bed, their faces masked and their arms in readiness for defense or attack.

"Ther 'Pache hain't turned up, boyees!"

Thus had spoken Monkey Mose, as his comrades rode past him into the passage. These words explained all to them and relieved their minds, as they had been looking for something more serious.

Down the range all galloped toward the motte, in which Black Bob had left Major Malcolm asleep, all keeping a course, after getting near their objective point, which would render them safe from observation by any one in Boulder City.

The motte was reached and searched; but as we know, neither the major nor the Indian was there.

Plain signs of a struggle were to be seen, which, however, would not have been noticed, had not the outlaw chief known the exact spot in which he had seen the old man lying.

With a volley of fierce curses and threats, Black Bob now spurred on the back trail, up the range; again bidding his men follow, and keep their eyes and ears open.

At times all would halt and listen intently; but hearing nothing until some distance from the motte. Then, upon again halting, the chief held up a hand in caution, saying:

"Listen, boys! Hang me if I don't think I can hear the red cuss!"

"Hit's ther 'Pache, dead sure; an' he's up thet ravine!"

These words were spoken by one of the bandits in much excitement and relief.

It required no intent listening, to hear the wild chant of the Indian, especially when he broke into exultant whoops.

"Blast him! What is he doing? They might hear him in the burg, and that would bring the 'cits' on a hunt. Spur into the pines here, boys! Dismount, and follow me as quietly as you can!"

The order was quickly obeyed. Black Bob and his men rushed into the dark and narrow ravine, and along the same, at as great speed as was possible. Soon they surmounted the ascent, and stood at the entrance to the little rock-bound basin, which seemed the crater of an extinct volcano.

The bright moonlight illumined the strange scene, which caused the bandits to halt, in open-mouthed wonder. The chief was dumfounded, anxious, and relieved at the same time.

There stood Major Malcolm, bound to the dead stump of a tree, in the center of the basin, his head sunk upon his breast, and he evidently senseless. Whirling, bounding, and crouching, with brandished knife and tomahawk, around the captive, sped Red Eagle, in a fiendish torture-dance; his infernal whoops ringing and echoing through the gulches and seams of the range!

"Just in time! If we ain't, Satan burn me!" cried out Black Bob. "Come on, boys! We must save that old man's life, if we have to kill Red Eagle. The cuss is drunk, but he fraze to his captive. If he hadn't, I would have shot him. Now for it, boys!"

With revolver leveled, Black Bob rushed forward, his men following at his heels. None uttered a word, but the sounds made by their feet were detected by the keen-eared Apache, and he sprang between them and his captive.

"Don't you kill him, Red Eagle, or I'll bore you!" yelled the outlaw leader.

A taunting whoop was the reply of the Apache, as he whirled about, facing his victim. His gleaming tomahawk shot upward, the keen blade hovered an instant in the air, over the gray head of Major Malcolm, and then started upon its murderous descent. But, at that very instant, the sharp bang of Black Bob's revolver awoke the echoes of the range, and Red Eagle fell backward; his tomahawk flying from his nerveless grasp, with a clang upon the rocks.

Prone, as if dead, the Apache renegade lay, outstretched before his unconscious captive.

"That saves the old man, and a heap of my ducats!" exclaimed the bandit chief; "but I hope I haven't killed the red, for he's been of service to us, and we can use him yet to advantage."

"You'll never use him, cap'n," asserted one of the outlaws, as he examined the Indian.

"Has he caved in for good?" asked the chief, anxiously and regretfully.

"Nary time, Cap! Yer bullet just tore his scalp a leetle, an' knocked him blind."

"Then what do you mean?"

"I means he's a 'Pache."

"Explain yourself, Jim!"

"He'll never forgive er fergit. He'd take his own scalp afore he'd do yer a favor now. An' arter he comes back ter biz, I opines he'll be dangerous."

Black Bob laughed disdainfully, as he returned:

"You're 'way off, Jim Duncan! Why, the cuss would starve to death if it wasn't for us. He dare not go into the burg, or anywhere else, except hide in the mountains. His own tribe would hunt him to earth, and he knows it!"

"All right, cap'n! Yer kin opine es yer wants; but I'm ther boss liar o' New Mex ef I doesn't gamble high ducats thet yer'll find my gabble come true ef yer 'lows ther red cuss ter scramble outen this scrape!"

"I'll risk it, Jim! But look, boys—there's his bottle of whisky. He's a sly dog, and corraled that from the stores."

"Reckon we'll sample bit, ef thar's any left," said Duncan; "I'm awful dry, fer one."

"Pitch in, boys, and I'll cut the old man loose. The red scared him nearly to death."

"Suppose you pour a little of that whisky on Red Eagle's head, and then set the bottle alongside of him," continued the chief. "He's a fine-looking brave in his new rig, and I hope he'll come back to the cave all right in every way."

"Better leave him as he is, for if we bring him around he'll be apt to be in a bad humor. Give him time to think matters over."

"Here, two of you, bring the old major down the ravine—or hold on! pass that bottle. We'll revive him and make him walk."

Black Bob raised the head of the old man and poured a small stream of liquor down his throat. With a groan and shudder Major Malcolm opened his eyes. Soon he seemed to realize his surroundings, and the near past.

The outstretched form of the Apache was a startling reminder.

The major swept his eyes around upon the masked faces.

Everything was recalled on the instant.

"Oh, Heaven help me!" he cried, in a hopeless voice; "my child, my darling Maude!"

"Don't you worry about your daughter, Major Malcolm. I'll take care of you, and her, too!"

Thus spoke the leader of the band.

"In the name of justice and humanity," cried out the old man, "who are you that know my name and that of my daughter?"

"I'll not introduce myself just yet, my respected friend. You will know me soon enough. I have saved you from death at the hands of that Indian, but for a purpose which must, for the present, remain a secret."

"Come! Get up and walk lively! When we clear the ravine I shall let you ride."

"Where am I, and where are you taking me?" demanded the major.

"Don't bother yourself asking questions which will not be answered," was the reply.

"You are a set of criminals and cowards!" said the old man, bitterly; for he was hopeless, and in utter despair.

"Shut up!" said the bandit leader, fiercely. A deep groan burst from Major Malcolm's lips.

In all his agony self-condemnation was uppermost. He recognized the fact that it was his uncalled-for longing to increase his already ample fortune that had brought him where he was.

Not only so; but he now felt sure that he had sent for his idolized daughter, thus luring her to a fate that was too terrible to think of; that she would fall into the power of the miscreant who already held him captive.

Such were the unenviable meditations of the major, and such they continued to be when he found himself confined in a cavern to which he had been conveyed blindfolded.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HONORS THRUST UPON HIM.

BOWLDER BILL lay in the cavern, within the glare of the flaring torches, which he, at times, renewed; having gathered a quantity of light-wood knots at the *molle* outside.

It was a wild scene indeed, and yet grand and splendid—a scene, that would have made the heart of an artist of the Rembrandt school pulsate with delight. All was strangely wild, and grandly beautiful.

But, although the lids of Boulder Bill were closed, he slept not.

He had been deeply moved and interested in the Man from Taos, and he was more than ever convinced that his first impressions of his peculiar pard were correct.

From gazing at the rich outcroppings of gold quartz, which he believed would be the means through which he would be enabled to claim his darling Maude for his own through life, the young man's thoughts again became absorbed in dwelling upon the old mystery—the words of Black Bob, the bandit chief.

The more Will Stone pondered upon the subject, and strove to account for an outlaw, in that wild region, being acquainted with his name, and that of the Malcolms, the more bewildered he became.

Yet, he was satisfied that the bandit chief meant mischief to himself and the Malcolms; although, in what manner the outlaw could injure those who were far away, in St. Louis, our young friend was unable to decide.

It seemed simply impossible.

It seemed next to impossible, also, that this Black Bob could, in any way, injure himself.

However, if the outlaw chief had a large band of followers, he might, when this mine had been opened, and was being worked, prove himself very troublesome.

The longer Boulder Bill meditated upon it, the more uneasy he became.

He felt that he ought to be in Boulder City; yet, for his life, he could not explain this feeling.

At length, however, he fell into a slumber, from which he did not awaken until the hand of Bug-Juice Bill was laid upon his shoulder. He then sprang to his feet.

"Mornin', pard!" said the Man from Taos, in an apologetic manner; "didn't want ter woke yer up, but hit's past sun-up outside."

"Is it possible? Good-morning to yourself, Bentley. I did not get asleep until near morning, I was so worried about what we were speaking of last night."

"I don't care a fig for myself, you know—I'd enjoy another shooting-match with the masked scoundrel when there would be a better chance for a dead shot for each of us—but you know on whose account I am anxious. But how can he harm Miss Malcolm, and she in St. Louis?"

"All gas, pard! He's a blow. Ther leetle gal can't be hurted by him. Dang hit, ef he worries yer I'll blow up ther hull range, find ther cuss, an' squeeze ther life outer his car-kidge!"

"But," said the young man, "the villain spoke in as confident a tone as if he had the deadwood on all of us."

"Don't fret, pard! We-uns 'll git deadwood onter him, an' don't yer disremember hit. I'm talkin' myself, Bug-Juice Bill—Bill Bentley, o' Taos!"

"I hope we will, Bentley; but this won't do. Let us drop the outlaw and get at our own biz. What's to be done about the mine?"

"In the first place, however, you must have some new togs. We're pards in everything, and you and I must dress exactly alike. There's a man in the burg with a fair stock of clothing, buckskin breeches and everything."

"Here's a hundred dollars. Fix yourself up when we go back, and keep straight. I must go to Denver and purchase a furnace, crusher, tools and timber, but it will be some time before we can get them here on a mule-train."

"We'll have to run a track out into the little valley, and erect buildings there. Can wagons be got through the ravine, think you?"

"Ya-as, with a little blastin' an' slingin' out o' rock. Reckon yer made up ther p'ogramme last night, fer yer gut things down fine, pard. I'll take ther ducats es a borrrer, an' sorter spruce up. I needs ter, ef any human ever did."

"But how about this 'find' of yours? Is there not danger of prospectors striking our trail and jumping your claim?"

"Hit'd be a bad ole jump, pard, I sw'ar! But I reckon we'd better leave our 'sign' right hyer, an' wall up ther hole yunder."

"Howsomever, I 'lows ter hang out in this hole ther bestest part o' ther time. Hit'll dome good ter go et ther croppin's with my pick an' drill, ef I don't chip off much."

"I'll fix up, git some grub, an' locate right hyer while yer goes ter Denver; but yer mustn't stay long, fer hit'll be p'ison lonesome without yer. I hates ter lose sight o' yer, fer thet Black Bob mought hev a hefty crowd o' throat-cuts with him, an' scoop yer outen ther hearse."

Boulder Bill laughed, as he returned:

"I don't believe he'll be as daring as that. But time flies, Bentley. We'll strike out for the burg. The mine is safe for the present; but I'll put a paper on the wall, to make sure, and we'll leave the tools here."

Quickly the young man wrote in large letters upon a half-sheet of foolscap; but he was interrupted by the Man from Taos, who said:

"Hold on, pard! What'll we call ther find?"

"Why, the 'Bentley Bonanza,' of course."

Bug-Juice Bill scratched his head meditatively, and returned:

"Pard, I war opinin' ter call hit 'Mule Mine.'"

"What the mischief for?"

"Kase, I'd never struck hit, ef hit hedn't bin fer my mule. Ther anermile meandered in hyer, fotchin' me along; and I slid off, and fell plum asleep, fer I don't know how long."

"When I crawled out, I gut a pine-knot, an' lit hit, an' ther flicker o' ther blaze shined onter ther outcroppin's. I zaminied some, knocked off ther chunk I showed yer, an'—well, thet's all!"

"No wonder you prize that mule, pard, but I don't fancy the name, for all that. I want you to have the honor attached to this marvelous 'find.' It will cause you to be known all over the civilized world."

"Ya-as, pard, but Nannie an' ther leetle boy air in ther t'other world, an' I don't keer much fer this. Le's call hit 'Boulder Bill Bonanza! How'll thet sound 'roun' civerliza-way?"

"Not a bit!" impatiently.

"Then 'Maude Mine' air ther handle. Reckon I've struck yer whar yer live, this trip."

"I'm sure, Bentley, I ought to thank you kindly for the honor you intend; but I still must advocate 'Bentley Bonanza.' It sounds firmer and more substantial."

"Go ahead! Call hit 'Black Bob Bonanza,' ef yer wants, pard. Call hit anythin', an' le's levant outen this. I want fresh air."

Will laughed heartily, and his pencil ran rapidly over the paper.

In a few minutes, the same was stuck against the outcrop of the vein, being held by a piece of quartz. It read thus:

"BENTLEY BONANZA."

"Discovered by Bill Bentley, of Taos. To be opened shortly. Located and staked. Tools must not be molested, and no trespassers allowed in this cave. Lookout for the Grizzly Bear next door! Bug-Juice Bill's shooter is pointed at you now. Don't touch even a chip of quartz, but 'git up and git,' while your head's whole."

"BILL BENTLEY, alias BUG-JUICE BILL,
"THE TAOS TERROR."

Boulder Bill read this to his pard, who became convulsed with laughter, and wrung the hand of the writer. Then, with blankets, bags, and equipments, they left the cave.

Will saddled and bridled his horse, Bentley gave a peculiar whistle, and soon his most miserable-looking mule advanced, its long ears flopping dolefully.

Bug-Juice Bill jerked his bowie, and, with the back of the knife, scraped down the mule's neck; removing scores of woodticks, while he kept muttering words of salutation.

Then he threw his leg over the wretched animal's back, settled himself, and yelled:

"Git, Beauty! Git!"

Boulder Bill mounted his steed, shaking with laughter; for he could not avoid it. The Man from Taos, and his mule, presented a side-splitting picture.

"I say!" yelled Bentley; "how would 'Beauty Bonanza' hev did fer ther mine?"

His pard sunk to the saddle-born, in the most boisterous laughter.

It required but a short time to reach the burg; for, this time, there was no harassing search up and down gulches and ravines.

But, as they entered the lower end of the street, next the range, our two friends were greatly astonished; for the entire space between Boulder Hotel and Booze Bazaar was crowded with miners, all seeming half-drunk, or greatly excited.

The fact was, that Long Horn had insisted upon getting up a searching party, and starting

out for Boulder Bill; asserting that Black Bob had "scooped" their newly elected sheriff in, out of the mountain dew.

Both men gazed at the crowd in amazement, Will driving spurs, and causing his horse to bound up the street; the mule starting forward, and keeping neck and neck with him, to the wonder of the crowd.

No sooner were our friends recognized, than a most terrific whoop of welcome sounded from the citizens. Then, throwing his sombrero in the air, Long Horn yelled:

"Three howls fer Boulder Bill, ther Sheriff o' Boulder City, New Mex'!"

And three "howls" were given, which might have been heard on distant peaks of the range, had there been any one there to hear.

To say that Will was astonished, would be putting it mildly. He was almost petrified. Both he and Bug-Juice Bill though the whole burg was drunk, or crazy. They were soon surrounded by the yelling mob, who cheered Bug-Juice Bill for being sober for once; and fairly bore both men upon their shoulders, into Booze Bazaar, where they placed them on the bar, speechless with wonder.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MISSING MAJOR.

"SPEECH! Speech! Speech!"

"Sling us some slam-up gab, sheriff!"

"Whoop up yer edicate, Boulder Bill!"

"Prove thet ye're a mountain screamer!"

"Show yerself a howlin' hero!"

"Hooray fer a tanglefoot an' tongue jam-boree!"

"Ker-whoop fer liquid an' lip!"

"Hooray fer ther sugar-coated sheriff o' ther Sierras!"

"Listen ter Boulder Bill, what made Black Bob go a-b'ilin'!"

Such were some of the cries that rung from the crowd, as Will Stone, unable to speak or to resist, was placed upon the bar-slab in a standing position; but the terrific yell of Long Horn, who now rapped on the bar with the handle of his bowie, caused the tumult to subside somewhat. Then the Texan himself sprang on the bar and spoke:

"Feller-cits, air yer all gone plum lunified, er air yer drunk es Injuns arter crossin' ther Grande an' fillin' up wi' mescal? Ef you air I'll sw'ar yer've bin runnin' hefty et Pig Pretzel's, fer yer didn't sling ducats 'nough, 'cross my slab ter even make yer feel good."

"Dang hit! Doesn't yer see thet yer hes gut Boulder Bill all sot back an' mixed up? What does he know 'bout what's bin goin' on hyer when he's bin down ther range prospectin'? We-uns," he said, turning to the young man, "war jist 'bout settin' out ter hunt yer up, fer we thought yer hed bin tuck by ther Bag-Slashers."

"Now, listen, pard. Ther hearse war held up yisterday mornin', an' ther passengers war cleaned out of every ducat by Black Bob an' his gang, an' we-uns hed a meetin' o' cits, an' elected yeou sheriff o' this hyer burg. We-uns don't perpose ter be run by Black Bob, er hev ther prospec's o' this locate ruined by sich cusses."

"We reckon on yeou bein' jist ther right-up-an'-at-'em, slam-up, chuck-full-o'-sand sort of a pilgrim ter run ther burg, an' bu'st'up, with our help, ther hull Bag-Slasher lay-out!"

"Now, boyees, yer kin let off yer extra breathe an' vim. Three howls an' a ker-whoop fer Boulder Bill, Sheriff o' Boulder City, New Mex'!"

Not until Long Horn had finished did Will fully comprehend matters. Then he was forced to laugh, long and loud, at the mass of faces which were upturned to him. The sight was comical in the extreme.

He felt, however, that it was a double compliment and honor to have been elected to office in his absence.

The room became still at length, all knowing that their new sheriff, now that he understood matters, would address them, and they were not mistaken nor disappointed.

"Gentlemen," said Boulder Bill, as he gave a sweeping glance over his audience, "you cannot imagine how you have surprised me by all this. I had not the remotest idea what was the difficulty with you all when I rode up. I am astonished and indignant to learn that the stage has been 'pulled up' by the Bag-Slashers."

"We know now, however, what to expect and what to do. Black Bob, whoever he is, is at the head of this organization: and we must take measures to break the gang up at once. If they are to be found, we'll do it, and not half try." (Cheers.)

"I thank you heartily for the honor you have conferred upon me, a comparative stranger; and although I have business of importance of my own, which will occupy much of my time, I feel it my duty to consent to fill the office, to which you have elected me, to the best of my ability. And, as I do not, at this moment, think it possible for me to attend to my urgent personal affairs and my public duties, I propose that you elect a marshal, and a deputy-marshal; one of whom shall remain in the town during my absence, and that of the other."

"Allow me to nominate Long Horn as mar-

shal, and I believe he can, himself, select a deputy; as he is well acquainted with the merits, and competency of his fellow-citizens. It will be best, I think, to proceed at once in search of the bandits; taking the trail, at the point where the coach was robbed. Again thanking you, gentlemen, for the unexpected honor you have conferred upon me, allow me to order liquid refreshments for the especial use of those who consider them essential."

Amid a repetition of the boisterous cheering, Long Horn began waiting upon the motley crowd. But their excitement was destined to be much increased, as was their indignation; for, as the glasses were returned empty to the bar, a miner entered by the back way, and with a yell that drew the attention of all, held up a letter.

All looked at him in surprise.

"Whar's Willyum Stone?" cried out the newcomer. "Hyer's a letter whut he's lost. I picked it up, nigh ther range; an' I sw'ar I bain't read bit, fer I c'd'n't ef I wanted tu."

Boulder Bill held out his hand for the epistle.

"That's my letter, pard," he said; "but I didn't lose it, by a long shot."

Glancing at the missive, he continued:

"Gentlemen, here is a letter sent to me from St. Louis. It was in the mail, and has been opened and read by Black Bob, and probably lost by him."

"The bandit chief is a personal enemy of mine, as he announced when I chased him from the burg; but I am willing to take my oath that I do not know him, and that I have given him no cause to be my enemy. He is, it seems, the foe also of others, who are now in St. Louis, and whom I regard highly. This letter is from one of them, and may give me some clew."

"I'll run the villain to earth, and jerk a lariat on him, or my cog's not Boulder Bill!"

Wild yells rung on all sides.

The young man was about to read Maude's letter, when Pig Pretzel worked his way through the crowd, with a startled expression on his now pale face. He motioned for Long Horn to approach and then spoke:

"Dunder und Blitzen, sbentlemens! Py tam! Vot you dinks comes der nex' dime ag'in, when dot Pl.ck Pob comes indo mine hodel, und sdeals von man vot stops mit me from his room? Dot vos so!"

"Gott in Himmell! I vos so scared I rolis down-stairs, when I not finds Macher Malgum in dot room already!"

Will clutch'd the startled landlord, as if he would rend him to pieces, demanding:

"What's that? What name did you say?"

"Mein Gott! Vot I did say vos dedruth. You can see hees name on der book. He vos ropt mit dot stage. Plack Pob dakes his ducats, und den gooms to mine howus, und dakes him, too. Py tam! Vot shall goom dot nex' dimes?"

Boulder Bill rushed like a madman through the crowd, across the street, and into Boulder Hotel.

Catching up the register, his face turned the pallor of death, for he saw that the Dutchman had given the name correctly.

Major Malcolm had been on the coach, and since reaching the burg, had been mysteriously kidnapped from his room!

Now, indeed, the threats of Black Bob seemed no mere empty boasts.

But, in the name of wonder, what had brought Major Malcolm, of all men, to the Rocky Mountains!

What could it mean?

Will Stone was not only puzzled, but alarmed and apprehensive as well.

Would the bandit chief murder the major, and for what?

The outlaw had, it seemed, taken his victim's money, allowed him to keep on to Boulder City, and then kidnapped him. Thus had one of Black Bob's threats, in his programme of vengeance, been fulfilled.

Would the others?

When Will had read Maude's letter, he learned therefrom, for the first time, that a spy had been hidden among the vines during their farewell interview, and also the fearful words he had used.

In an instant it all flashed upon the young man's mind. This spy was none other than Black Bob.

"But, then, who was Black Bob?"

Maude Malcolm had not mentioned the man's name, but it was evident he must have been some hopeless lover, incited to revenge by what he had overheard in the arbor.

The letter gave very little information; but, as it had been dated only two days after Will's departure, he knew it had been lying for some time at Fountain City. Other letters from the young girl must have been forwarded from that place in the same mail. This was certain.

One of these, doubtless in the hands of the outlaw chief, must contain some information in regard to the departure of Major Malcolm for New Mexico, his object, and his reasons for leaving her thus alone and unprotected.

Could it be possible that Black Bob had, in some manner lured the major to Boulder City, in order that he might rob him and get him into his power; using the old man to induce his

daughter also to come to the West, and thus become his helpless victim?

All this, when considered with the threats of the bandit chief, seemed but too reasonable; and, like a madman, Boulder Bill rushed into the street, sprung upon his horse, and galloped wildly up the stage trail, toward the scene of the robbery; he having been informed of the exact point where the "hold-up" was made.

But our young friend was not to make this search for outlaws, by himself; for a score of men, Bug Juice Bill at their head, followed him, all amazed at the change that had come over him in so short a time.

Those who were forced to remain behind, for want of horses, were wild with excitement, and furious at the dastardly outrage—the kidnapping, as they fully believed, of the old man from Boulder Hotel, after robbing him of every dollar previously.

This seemed as though the bandits were determined to prove, that they did not care a picayune for the citizens of the burg, by taking a man from his room, in the principal public house in the town.

Certainly they would have held on to the major at the stage, when they had him in their power, had they not wished to prove their contempt for the miners; and this they had most assuredly done.

This view of the case made them all furious, and Long Horn went outside; walking nervously around the outside of Booze Bazaar, gazing keenly up and down the range, and cursing so terribly that, as a witness and listener, less excited, had asserted, "he jist swored all ther bark off'm ther slabs o' Booze Bazaar!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CONFLICT AMONG THE CLIFFS.

BOWLDER BILL expected that some of the "cits" would follow him, and he was right. Bug-Juice Bill directed those who were with him to scatter, and search for "sign" of the road-agents. All knew that an army of men could be easily secreted among the ravines and gulches, within five miles of Boulder City, either up or down the range. Consequently, they were well aware of the difficulties of the search.

The miner, who had found the letter, was with the mounted party; and, at the request of the Man from Taos, he guided the latter to the *motte* where Major Malcolm had been captured by Red Eagle. There, they at once detected, and read "sign," as far as was possible. The evidences of a struggle were plain.

Major Malcolm was supposed to have been kidnapped from his room, during the night; but it did not take Bug-Juice Bill long to trace the trail of the major, in the sward which led from the burg toward the *motte*; and there was no sign of a returning trail, or of any other person having accompanied him. Bill did not know whose trail it was; but he believed, from the tracks made by the boot-heels, that the major must have strolled from the hotel, and when resting in the *motte*, had been captured by the outlaws.

Had the Apache not been extremely cunning and guarded against leaving a sign to betray his presence near the town, the keen eyes of the miner and scout would have detected that he had been in the vicinity. As it was little knowledge was gained, except what has been stated.

But to return to Boulder Bill.

Galloping at once to the scene of the robbery he began examining the ground. He easily perceived that quite a number of bandits had been under the command of Black Bob. For a short distance from the stage road, the trail of the outlaws was plain.

Soon, however, the young man became discouraged. He, therefore, proceeded to the base of the range, striking the same about a rifle-shot in distance below the narrow ravine up which Red Eagle had first taken his captive. He felt confident, that Bug-Juice Bill and the "cits" with him would thoroughly examine the ground down the range.

A most important discovery was soon made by Boulder Bill, as he followed this trail, which led to the thicket in which the bandits had dismounted, left their animals and dashed up the gulch, on hearing the whoops of Red Eagle in his torture dance around Major Malcolm. The "sign" was here very plainly defined.

Where each horse had been secured the ground was much trampled and the surrounding bushes broken.

But, where had the outlaws been, while their steeds were in this thicket?

Boulder Bill determined to find out.

He soon discovered the opening of a dark and narrow ravine, but the rocks at his feet told no tale.

Drawing one of his revolvers he entered the narrow fissure in the mountain-side.

On and up he went, his keen gaze fixed ahead; but the windings of the ravine prevented him from detecting anything in front of him that would indicate an exit, until he had advanced a considerable distance. Then, upon turning abruptly, the bright sunlit space before

mentioned, burst into view through the narrow terminus of the ravine.

Stealthily the young man advanced. He felt strangely influenced toward prudence—felt that he was about to make a discovery.

And a discovery he did make.

The first object that met his gaze was a huge grizzly bear, clambering clumsily down the opposite wall of the basin, and growling savagely. Will sprung forward, and gazed into the basin bed.

There, to his amazement, lay a plumed and painted Indian, evidently alive. Not a moment was to be lost, or the terrible beast would reach its intended prey!

Such a fate was terrible to contemplate, even in thought.

Seizing his Sharp's carbine, he ran, as if his own life depended upon his speed, on the back trail, up the dark ravine. He felt that, even did he reach the side of the Indian before the bear, it would avail but little; for, probably, he would not be able to plant a bullet in a vulnerable spot.

No savage beast in the world was more difficult to slay than the grizzly, and Boulder Bill well knew that the attempt might cost him his own life. Still he hesitated not. To do so might be to condemn the red-man to a terrible fate.

Into the basin, with terrific bounds, and his rifle ready, the young man dashed, toward the outstretched form of Red Eagle; just as, with a fearful roar, the huge beast reached the base of the rough wall of the cliff. Will saw, at a glance that the Indian had, in some way, been wounded. For all that, he was now evidently asleep.

No time could be wasted in conjectures.

Planting himself between the prostrate Indian and the fierce monster of the mountains, Boulder Bill, with pale face and teeth set, awaited an opportunity to fire a shot that would count.

Then it struck him, that the Indian might assist in the conflict; and he sprung back, caught up the bottle that lay by the side of Red Eagle, and dashed the contents into the face of the Apache.

The growls of the grizzly sounded quite near.

Instantly it occurred to the young man, that he might have an advantage, by forcing the bear to its haunches; as he would then be better able to make his bullet prove fatal. It was doubtful, and indeed risky, work to shoot at the eye of the brute; for its head was moved constantly from side to side, by its ungainly gait.

At once Will decided upon his line of action.

He dashed directly toward the monster, then not fifteen feet away.

The savage brute reared upward, to meet the attack; but, darting to one side, the intrepid young man pointed the muzzle of his carbine within two inches of the back of the beast, and pulled trigger. At the same instant, he sprung to the front of the bear; but the animal, with a terrific howl of pain and rage, sunk toward him, striking at him with its powerful forepaw. This sent the carbine out of Will's hands, and hurled him, bleeding and senseless, upon the rocky bed of the basin.

But the spine of the savage beast had been broken, and, unable to use its hinder parts, it dragged itself toward its fallen assailant, clawing the rocks as it went. Boulder Bill's time seemed to have come.

But Red Eagle had been awakened—indeed he had been almost strangled by the strong liquor, which had been dashed into his mouth and nostrils. With a howl of astonishment, the Apache sprung to a sitting posture; but the growls of the bear had prevented Boulder Bill from hearing this.

At first, the Indian understood not his condition, neither did he realize anything of the near past. He could not comprehend the cause of his half-strangled condition, but the whisky he had swallowed served to strengthen him, and he rubbed his eyes vigorously; the strange sounds, so near him, serving to hasten his recovery. He at once recognized what it was that produced them.

Yet Red Eagle was unable to arise at once to his feet. He saw, however, the sharp conflict between the man and the grizzly; saw the former fall senseless, and the latter, infuriated with rage and pain, slowly drag itself toward him.

The Apache knew this pale-face must have risked his life to save him—that this now unconscious and endangered man had poured the whisky in his face to revive him, and had then sprung, to battle with the bear. When he realized this, the savage breast of the Indian swelled with gratitude and stern resolve; and, with the wild war-cry of his tribe bursting from his lips, he sprung to his feet.

A moment more, and the red-man's arm was around the neck of the wounded beast, and his knees pressing upon the severed spine.

The scene that followed was terrible!

It did not, however, long continue.

By a terrible exertion of the muscles that yet remained under its control, the bear turned the rock, and threw its forward parts upward, the Apache still clinging to its neck with his arm, and its body with his legs. Over they

rolled together, when suddenly Red Eagle released his grip, jerked his revolver, placed the muzzle at the monster's eye, and fired.

A sharp report, and the struggle was ended.

As the Indian saw this his form straightened proudly, his blood dripping bowie circled proudly about his sable plumes, and his whoop of victory rung and echoed amid the peaks. But he still swayed from side to side, and the blood welled from terrible bruises upon his head and body.

Ere the echoes had died away, the Apache chief sunk to his knees, and then fell backward, his head upon the breast of the senseless white man, who lay thus through an effort to save him from death!

Strange and impressive, indeed, was that scene, in that rocky and isolated basin, far above the foot-hills.

And who, amid those foot-hills, could place or locate the sounds that echoed from cliff to cliff, and from peak to peak?

CHAPTER XXVI.

RECOGNIZED BY THE RENEGADE.

At length the eyes of Boulder Bill slowly opened; but it was some time before he could recall what had happened. His amazement may be imagined, when, upon being able to discern objects, he perceived the plumed head and hideous face of the Indian resting on his breast.

A feeling of loathing and revulsion almost sickened him; but soon he recalled to mind the conflict with the grizzly, in which he had been engaged.

But how came he beneath the Indian's head? This was a mystery.

Had the bear been killed?

Will remembered that he had not succeeded in slaying the huge beast, and he now threw off the lethargy that had bound him, and slowly raised himself upward. Gaining a sitting posture, our young friend saw that the savage was senseless, and that he was badly battered, bruised and bleeding.

Another glance showed the monster of the range lying within five feet of him, evidently dead.

Further examination revealed the fact that the Indian clutched a gore-stained knife and revolver.

All was now plain to Boulder Bill.

The Apache had saved his life.

This was quite evident, for the grizzly had made its way some distance from the spot at which he had shot him.

Gently removing the head of the unconscious brave from his knees, our young friend arose to his feet, but with difficulty; for he was stiff and sore from the violence of the blow that had buried him to the ground.

Striding to the bottle, which, he saw, had retained its perpendicular when himself, the Indian and the bear had failed in this respect, he took it up, and returning with it, bathed the head, and poured some of the liquor between the lips, of Red Eagle. Soon the Apache was brought back to consciousness.

Opening his eyes, and observing the attentions of the pale-face, Red Eagle sprang to his feet, staggering at first, but by a powerful effort of the will, banishing weakness and pain, as he grasped the hand of Boulder Bill and pressed the palm to his breast in token of peace and brotherhood, saying:

"Red Eagle, he chief. Pale-face, he great brave. He Red Eagle brother. Save from bear, when Bad Spirit's whisky shut eyes. Red Eagle never forget."

"Some pale-face heap bad. Black Bob he heap bad pale-face. Red Eagle will have his scalp. Waugh!"

The face of the Apache showed every expression of hatred and revenge as he spoke.

"My brother heap good. When bad men shoot at my white brother, Red Eagle breast get bullet. Red Eagle jump before white brother."

Suiting the action to the word, the Apache sprang before Will, as if warding off danger or receiving a bullet aimed at him. Then he continued:

"Black Bob try kill Red Eagle. See," pointing to the wound of the bullet that had grazed his skull. "Black Bob's scalp shall hang at Red Eagle's belt. Waugh! It is good. What my white brother's name?"

"My name is Boulder Bill here in the mountains," returned Will, greatly excited from hearing the Indian mention the bandit chief; "but it is you who have saved my life, and came near losing your own in so doing. I am glad to have Red Eagle for my friend."

"But what is this about Black Bob? He is my enemy. He has carried away an old white-haired man from the town. Do you know where he hides? Or have you seen the captive?"

"Boulder Bill, he too much talk. Wait! Yes, Red Eagle see white-hair captive. Black Bob got him. See," pointing to the dead tree-trunk. "Black Bob tie there. Want go burn town. Then," pointing toward Boulder City, "Red Eagle say he no burn town."

"First say, yes. Then say, no. Black Bob shoot Red Eagle! Waugh!"

A vengeful whoop burst from the Apache's throat. The savage was nothing if not cunning.

Upon finding that the white man, who had been captured by him, was a friend to Boulder Bill, he had quickly concocted a story that would shift the guilt and vengeance upon the outlaw chief.

"But," repeated Will, "do you know where Black Bob hides?"

"Hole in mountains. There!" and the Indian pointed up the range.

"Good! You shall lose nothing by this, Red Eagle. How many men has he?"

"So many," indicating twenty with his fingers.

"So many!" in surprise. "Is it a place easy to defend where he hides?"

"Take heap braves. Small holes in rocks. So many warriors"—extending two fingers—"have fast-shooting guns. Stay in hole, shoot many braves. Keep heap big war-party away from cave."

"Nevertheless, we'll find a way to get in, and then clean them out. But we both are somewhat used up. Come, Red Eagle! Go with me to Boulder City, and have your wounds attended to. You are under my protection. No one shall harm you."

"Red Eagle, he Apache chief," returned the Indian proudly. "Red Eagle knows no fear."

As he spoke, he stalked forward, and severed the hind claws of the grizzly bear, extending them to Will, and saying:

"Boulder Bill kill half bear. Have half claws. It is good."

He then dexterously cut off the fore claws, and, running a buckskin string through a portion of the loose skin, bung them around his neck, the claws depending over his breast.

Then, as a small portion of the whisky was left, he passed the bottle to Boulder Bill, who was astonished at the Indian's refusing to drink.

"Bad medicine," he exclaimed; "heap bad. Make Injun fool. No know nothing. Waugh!"

Then, with a graceful gesture toward the ravine, he added:

"Red Eagle will go with Boulder Bill. Heap good friend. It is good. Sun there"—pointing beyond the zenith, westward; "when sun there"—pointing in the opposite direction—"show Boulder Bill where hole Black Bob. War-path open. Waugh!"

"All right, Red Eagle," returned Will, who had been meditating; "to-morrow will do well enough. We shall have to prepare for this attack, and be cautious, as the retreat of the Bag-Slashers is so easily defended."

"But, come; we shall need food, and our bruises must be attended to. This heat is bad for such wounds. My horse is below, and you can ride behind me. The beast can carry us both."

In fifteen minutes more, Boulder Bill and Red Eagle were thus riding, directly toward the stage trail; winding between the foot-hills, and the cedars and pines which shielded them from view.

Being unable to find Boulder Bill, and believing that the yells and the report of a rifle, which they had heard, proceeded from the outlaws, far up the mountains, who were thus showing their defiance—believing this, Bug-Juice Bill and the miners had returned to Boulder City, thoroughly fatigued, but not discouraged.

After the Man from Taos had made known what he had discovered at the pine molle, and exhibited a handkerchief which he had picked up, all felt confident that Major Malcolm had been captured while out for a stroll; indeed, they wished thus to believe, for they did not want it noised up and down the range that the bandits had entered the town, and taken a man from his bed in the hotel, without a shot being fired, or even any one's knowing it.

Such a thing would be a burning disgrace to the burg.

All knew that they would receive a welcome when they returned, and great praise for the discovery they had made; although, in reality, but little had been accomplished.

On the next day, they could begin where they had left off, and examine up the range; but they felt sure that the outlaws were in a good position, and that it would take a hard fight to dislodge and capture them.

All had staked their animals, and were in Booze Bazaar, explaining to Long Horn and the assembled "cits," the result of their search; every man among them being worried at the absence of their newly elected sheriff.

Pretty soon, a series of yells from Pig Pretzel, who stood in the doorway of his institution, drew all, in a stampede to the street.

"Underd' t'ousan tufyils! Gott in Himmel! Vot gooms nex' in dot Poulter Cidy! Look, poy—look up dot sdage roat!"

And, look they did; the next instant giving a wild yell of welcome, in chorus; for, down the decline, at headlong speed, came Boulder Bill, on his magnificent steed. But, suddenly, the yells were hushed. All gazed, in open-mouthed wonder; realizing, at once, why Pig Pretzel had been so excited. For the war-painted face of an Indian soon appeared over the young

horseman's shoulder, and the flaunting sable-plumes above his head.

Their sheriff was returning, and with an Apache warrior as a captive!

All believed this to be the case, and the air was rent with terrific yells of welcome and exultation.

But the face of the Man from Taos became positively frightful, in its expression of hatred, and he clutched at his bowie handle.

The sight of the Indian had brought to the front his oath of eternal vengeance.

The memory of the murder of "Nannie an' ther kid" ruled the breast and brain of poor Bug-Juice Bill.

Boulder Bill had thought of his pard, and of the latter's hatred of an Apache; and he gazed over the crowd, at once detecting the manifest signs of fury. Perceiving this, Will beckoned to the Man from Taos, yelling, as he came nearer.

"This buck is all right, pard Bill! He saved my life just now, and he will lead us to the cave of Black Bob."

These words made the wildest imaginable commotion.

The "cits" were in a whirl of excitement.

"Gentlemen," explained our young friend, as he jerked his horse to a halt. "I've been near being torn and devoured by a huge grizzly bear. This Indian killed the beast, after it had knocked me senseless upon the rocks. We are now both badly used up."

"This is Red Eagle, a chief once among the Apaches, but now a renegade from his tribe, and doomed to death by fire-torture, if ever captured by his own people, for affiliating with the whites."

"Black Bob tied him to a stake, in the mountains, and swore he would not set him free, until he promised to fire Boulder City. Red Eagle agreed to do so, was cut loose, and then defiantly laughed in the bandit's face, refusing to set fire to this town."

"Upon this, the outlaw chief shot the Apache, and left him for dead; the bullet, as you can see, grazing his skull. I found him, just as the grizzly was crawling upon him, and shot the bear; but the beast got the best of me, and would have torn me in pieces, had not Red Eagle revived, and finished him; fainting, as he put a bullet in the eye of the huge brute."

"Now, you all know that Red Eagle, the renegade Apache, is the friend and brother of Boulder Bill; and I hope all my friends will feel toward him as I do, especially you, pard,"—to the Man from Taos—"for you know he could not have had anything to do with that which has embittered your life."

The face of Bug-Juice Bill was a study.

Red Eagle stared at the Man from Taos as if awe-stricken.

This was but for a moment.

Then the Apache slid from the horse, and strode proudly toward the giant miner and avenger.

The latter folded his arms, straightened erect, as if striving with all his power of will to control himself and keep from plunging his knife into the Apache's heart.

"Red Eagle know Bug-Juice Bill. He from Taos. His heart sad. Look at Red Eagle. Listen. When moon grow small, then Bug-Juice Bill's heart be glad. No more sad. Red Eagle tongue not forked. It is good. Waugh!"

"By ther eternal, yer bes said too much er not enough, Red Eagle! Speak more, er I'll split yer from head ter heel!"

The left hand of the giant clutched the arm of the Indian as he spoke, and the right shot to his bowie-handle.

With a yell of warning, Boulder Bill sprang to the ground and started to separate his white and red pards; but suddenly he halted, his face ghastly, as the bright bowie-blade of the Man from Taos glittered over the sable plumes of the Apache chief.

Every eye was fixed upon the pair.

Red Eagle, dauntless, with arms folded across his breast, gazed into the face of his assailant, his stoical face betraying neither fear nor apprehension. Then his lips were seen to move, those nearest him detecting low, guttural murmurings.

But when the bowie-blade of Bug Juice Bill shot high in air, a yell of insane joy shot from his lips, his arms flew upward, and he fell upon his back in the dust of the road as if stricken by lightning.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HOPE DEFERRED.

THE astonishment of the "cits," upon seeing the Man from Taos fall senseless after the muttered words of Red Eagle, was intense, but momentary. Then many of them jerked weapons and made a rush upon the renegade Apache, who still stood, his arms folded as before.

But, instantly, Boulder Bill also jerked his revolvers, and, bounding to the side of the Indian, cried out in a clear and commanding voice:

"Halt, boys! Would you all rush upon a single foe? For shame! What has Red Eagle done, that you seek his life?"

"Don't yer see? He has wiped out a white man."

"Ther cuss hes sent Bug-Juice Bill over ther range, an' must foller speedy. Le's tortur' ther painted bellyun!"

"Stan' from under, sheriff, er yer'll git hurted!"

Such were the cries that answered him.

"Hold on!" returned the young man, calmly, his weapons still pointed. "You are mistaken, boys! The Apache has not lifted a weapon since he slid from my horse."

"My pard, Bill Bentley, is not hurt; he has only fainted. The poor fellow has suffered great privation of late, as you all know, and is anything but strong. I believe that Red Eagle told him some unexpected and pleasant news, which has had the effect of completely upsetting him."

"That red saved my life at the risk of his own. He might have levanted, and left me to be devoured by the grizzly bear. More than that, it is upon him we depend to find the retreat of Black Bob, exterminate the band, and rescue Major Malcolm."

"Red Eagle has, thus far, proved himself white and square. Let us prove ourselves the same, by being his friend, as it is our interest to be. He is wounded, and needs attention. We are both nearly famished. What are you thinking of?"

These words of Will had the desired effect.

They touched the sense of justice of the "cits," after they were satisfied of their mistake.

Boulder Bill drew Red Eagle aside, pointing to the hotel, and bidding him go there at once.

Then the young man turned to assist in the recovery of his pard, Bug-Juice Bill. This was soon accomplished, but the Man from Taos was no sooner restored than he began acting like a perfect maniac; yelling, shrieking, and howling, as he danced around madly.

"In Heaven's name, what ails you, pard?" demanded Boulder Bill. "What did the Apache tell you that has affected you so strangely?"

"Whar is he?" yelled the giant miner. "Ef he has lied ter me, I'll hash him, toast him, tortur' him! Pard Bill, they're livin'! Nannie an' ther kid warn't butchered. They're in a 'Pache village. They're captives!"

"Boyees, my leetle boy an' Nannie ain't left me, an' skipped over ther range. I'll hev 'em ag'in! Whar's ther 'Pache? Whar's Red Eagle?" Again the Man from Taos seemed nearly fainting in his excitement.

"Bring a bottle of whisky quick, boys!" yelled Boulder Bill; "he shut off too suddenly from stimulants, after his terrible spree, and he has been exposed to the hot sun without a hat. So this great joy has wilted him. I'm sure I don't wonder at it. I've seen so much excitement, since I struck this burg, that I don't feel just square in my upper works myself."

"Hyer yer air, pard!" said Long Horn, rushing forward with a bottle. "What in ther dickens air comin' nex'?"

No sooner had our friends reached the hotel, with Bug-Juice Bill, than they found, to their astonishment, that Red Eagle had disappeared. They felt reconciled to his departure, however, when they heard the explanation of Pig Pretzel who had held some converse with the Indian.

"Dot ret-skin," said the landlord, "vos scoot, levant, sdombede over mit der range. He say he vos go, find ow-ut ef Pug-Juice Pill's squaw und baboose vos all right. Ven he gooms pack he leads der poy to dake dem away. Den he leads fu'st, before, de poy into dot gave of Plack Pob. Vell, dot vos all vot I knows."

None of the citizens believed that Red Eagle would again show up, nor did they credit a word of the story he had told the Dutchman. But Will held a different opinion. He was confident, not only that the Apache had gone to inspect the village in which he believed Nannie Bentley and her child to be; but also, that he would soon return, and guide the "cits" to the outlaws' retreat.

The mind of poor Bug Juice Bill was in a terrible state; he being, at one time full of joy and hopefulness, at another, plunged into the deepest pits of despair.

From the fact that Red Eagle had given no explanation of the circumstances in connection with Nannie and the child having been spared, or accounted for the mangled remains at the destroyed home of Bill Bentley—also believed to have been those of his wife and boy—it was no wonder that the Man from Taos was at times terribly tortured by doubts of the truth of the Apache's story.

Many, besides him, could not help thinking that the cunning savage had concocted the whole story to save his own life.

For all this, Boulder Bill could not fully give up his confidence in the future good intentions of Red Eagle, as promised by him.

Under the circumstances, the Indian could not be blamed if, by a few words, he could save himself from being cut to pieces by the infuriated Man from Taos.

But the doings at Boulder City, for the two days that followed, are not necessary to record in detail. The search for the retreat of the Bag-Slashers was continued, but without success; headed by Boulder Bill, who delayed his trip to Denver, after the mills and furnaces, in his anxiety to rescue Major Malcolm.

Red Eagle did not make his appearance, and

even Will gave up all hope of seeing the Apache again.

His mind was greatly tortured during this time, for the mail brought him no letters from Maude Malcolm.

Meantime, as the bandits had not once been seen or heard of, all believed that Black Bob and his Bag-Slashers had, after securing the major, left the vicinity.

Bug-Juice Bill regained his natural strength of body and mind, but was in a most dejected state, often cursing Red Eagle, and vowing to capture and torture him for awakening hopes that were groundless. He spent the greater part of his time seated before the outcroppings of his bonanza, none except his pard, Boulder Bill, knowing where he was. Poor Bill Bentley was not, in this way, gratifying his avarice. It was only that he might, in solitude, think of his wife and child, and plan in his mind what he would do for them with the wealth he had so strangely discovered, if he was only so blessed as to recover his lost ones.

These solitary musings kept a spark of hope still burning in the miner's breast.

Boulder Bill strove to encourage his pard; for, by long and continued reasoning, he had decided that the Apache could not, in a moment's time, have concocted such a tale, unless there was some truth in it.

The miners returned to their work, and much "dust" was panned; paying streaks of pocket gold being struck, besides rich "finds" of quartz gold veins. Long Horn was greatly jubilant at the prospect of the burg being eventually a "slam-up, XXX City, with Boulder Bill as Alcalde.

Pig Pretzel lodged the speculator's who had been robbed, at the request of Will, who furnished them with all necessary funds; thus making friends, who appreciated him for his kindness, and were devoted to him. Thus matters progressed at Boulder City, and each day increased the apprehensions of our hero, in regard to both Major Malcolm and Maude.

And, what of Black Bob's Bag-Slashers? All had gone smoothly at the cave, none being allowed outside except spies; who at night sped up the range, to gain intelligence at stations on the main stage line.

The bandit chief had also telegraphed Maude, in words that would cause her to hasten to Boulder City at once, did the telegram from her father fail to have that effect.

Resolving to make a sure thing of it, he kept his men in the cave, in order that he might cause the citizens of the burg to decide that he and his outlaws had left the neighborhood.

His next swoop upon the "hearse" would be as startling a surprise as had been his first.

So Black Bob decided. Days passed, and the outlaw leader felt secure from any trouble through Red Eagle, whose vengeance he had at first feared.

All this time, Major Malcolm's life was made a hell to him, by the taunting words and threats of Black Bob. The latter thanked the old man for having sent for his daughter, thus giving him an opportunity to capture a bride.

Then the wretch disclosed his face to his old employer, and told him that he intended to rob the coach which brought his daughter; and that the money which she had been instructed to bring, as well as that forwarded by his bankers, should be taken, and distributed among his band.

"You insulted me," said the villain; "your daughter insulted me; and I swore to ruin you both, in money, and body, and soul, and I'll keep my oath!"

"When your fortune and your daughter are gone, then I reckon you'll go crazy for good and all, and I'll incarcerate you in some Insane Asylum; that is, if I spare your life."

After hearing this, the reader can imagine in what a demoralized state was the mind of Major Malcolm—incarcerated in a rocky cavern, fed with meager fare, and with every prospect of his idolized daughter's being in the same fearful situation at an early day!

The wonder was that the wretched man did not dash out his brains against the rocks.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DESOLATION BEHIND THEM.

LET us now return to St. Louis and Maude Malcolm.

When her father departed for the West, in such haste and in such great hopes, she felt truly desolate. The days were long and sad, but at length she received a letter from Will Stone, who, at the time of writing, was on his way down the rocky range toward that new and rich strike—Boulder City.

Often did the maiden hope that her father and her lover would meet, and under such circumstances as to cause the former to become friendly to Will, and learn to appreciate him.

But a dark cloud seemed to have fallen over the Malcolm mansion, and its beautiful young mistress was soon to learn that the same dark shadow encompassed her father, and was drawing closer and closer to herself.

The telegram of the major came to hand, and at first gave Maude the greatest distress.

Her father, it appeared, had again lost a large amount, this time by a bold robbery. Yet he was still hopeful, and confident of ultimate success in his proposed speculations.

He wished her to join him immediately, and to bring with her twenty thousand dollars.

Will Stone was in Boulder City, and Maude, instead of shrinking from the perils and hardships of such a journey, was rejoiced.

The servants were surprised not only at the changed appearance of their mistress, but upon being informed that the house was to be closed, and they all discharged, except the old gardener and general supervisor of the establishment.

The young girl ordered her carriage, and drove at once to her father's banker's to draw the required sum, and there ascertained that the major had telegraphed them for ten thousand dollars more, this last to be sent by express, the money having already been placed in an envelope, to be conveyed to the express office at the hour of the closing of the bank—the cashier having decided to attend to the matter himself.

Maude Malcolm returned to her home, not dreaming that a strange man, a villainous criminal, who had been acting the spy for Robertson, since the departure of the latter, and who had secreted himself in the mansion, had entered her rooms during her absence, and perused the major's telegram.

Such indeed was the case. Sleepy Sim was on the alert, being confident that his hopeful pal had been at work, and had robbed Major Malcolm. But the miscreant had a big job on hand, to carry out his pal's plot; however, he resolved to neglect nothing, although a life sentence behind the iron bars stared him in the face.

Being a professional burplar, Sleepy Sim resolved that he would rake in a pile for his own especial benefit, while he was at it: reasoning that there were good pickings in this fine old house, and which he would secure before applying the torch.

After paying off, and dismissing the servants, with the exception of old Dan, Maude at once began packing, and preparing for her journey. At the usual hour, she retired, feeling quite weary, but bright and hopeful.

The next morning at breakfast, however, the door-bell rung, and old Dan brought his mistress another telegram, which plunged her into despair and anguish. As she read the same, indeed, Maude came near fainting.

It ran as follows:

"FOUNTAIN CITY, July 20th, 187-.

"MISS MAUDE MALCOLM, St. Louis, Mo.:-

"Have commenced my work. Your father met with a heavy loss. I was the means of it, and I now hold him fast. W. S. is here. I shall grip him next. Revenge is my war-cry. R. R."

Before the receipt of this terrible telegram, Maude had been anxious to start on her journey; but, after reading it, she was frantic to go on the next train.

Old Dan was quite concerned in regard to her; and, in her great sorrow, she related all to this old and attached servant. It was necessary, she told him, that he should keep his eyes open, and employ a private officer, if he saw any suspicious persons lurking around.

Maude secured the twenty thousand in greenbacks, which were of large denominations, in a cloth belt which she wore under her dress; carrying an amount sufficient for her needs on the journey, in a pocket-book. This, with a five-chambered Colt's revolver, she placed in a sachel which she intended to keep in her hand continually.

When all was in readiness, she bade the faithful old servant farewell, sadly, and not without some gloomy forebodings. But, soon after, she was flying over the iron rails at great speed, toward Denver; having banished from her mind every thought, except that she was going to balk the plans of the miscreant Robertson, and effect the rescue of her father. Not for a moment did Maude believe that Robertson could capture Will Stone; or, if he did, that he could retain him in captivity.

Will Stone was no easy man to deal with. Of this, the young girl was confident, or she would have been hopeless as to the future.

But how had it been that her father had been taken? Perhaps Robertson had organized a band of robbers. Having plenty of money, the proceeds of his forgeries, this would be easy to do.

Speeding toward that wild border, we now leave our heroine, to meet her again near the end of her journey.

It was the night following the departure of Miss Malcolm that old Dan, having secured the premises, and let loose the watch-dog, sat by the kitchen fire, quietly smoking. Soon a slight clink caught the old man's ear.

The door that led into the kitchen opened from a passage which connected with the dining-room, and both had been left slightly ajar.

In a strong closet in the latter apartment, and which was made more secure by an inner iron door, the silver was kept. There was quite a valuable assortment of family plate, which the burglars had not been able to secure when they

entered the house while the major and his daughter were in New Orleans.

The gardener was positive that a burglar had now succeeded in unlocking both of these doors. How he could have gotten into the house was a mystery, but getting into the closet was a still greater one. The situation required immediate action on Dan's part. Quickly he removed his shoes and stepped out of the kitchen.

A low growl from the dog caused the servant to realize that the alarm was given. At the same moment a bright sheet of flame lighted up the open door of the dining-room, and Sleepy Sim, with a bag over his shoulder, sprung into the passage. The dog bounded forward, only to be dashed to the floor by the bag of silver, and the burglar ran against Dan in the passage, the latter instantly pulling trigger.

The bullet missed its aim, but the dog sprung like lightning upon Sleepy Sim.

Starting up, old Dan saw a frightful sight.

The house was in flames and the burglar lay dead, his throat torn to the bone and the paws of the dog upon his breast.

Dragging the faithful beast with him, Dan staggered in terror from the passage.

The shutters of the lower floor of the mansion being closed, the flames were not discovered from the street until the fire had made its way up the staircase and through the floors. Then, as the old servant staggered to the front of the building, unable to articulate a word, and gasping for breath, the cry of "Fire" rung from many a throat in the street.

The excited mob, the fire engines, and the hook-and-ladder companies soon dashed upon the scene, but the mansion was a mass of flames and doomed to destruction.

The beautiful gardens were trampled, arbors and shrubbery crushed, and in a few hours old Dan and Nero—the former weeping, the latter uttering low growls—sat upon a retired garden seat, the fine old house but smoldering embers, and naught but ruin and desolation where, but a few hours before, a palatial residence stood amid beautiful arbors and shrubbery, and surrounded by a sea of flowers and statuary.

And what of him who had applied the torch—what of Sleepy Sim?

His calcined bones were mingled with the ashes of the Malcolm mansion!

CHAPTER XXIX.

RED EAGLE'S TONGUE NOT FORKED.

BLACK BOB had a spy at Fountain City, in anticipation of Maude's arrival in response to the telegrams, and instructed to let his chief know when the young lady was on the coming "hearse." This was now the great anxiety.

Once he had the maiden in his power, with the twenty thousand dollars she would bring, and the ten thousand the bankers would send, Black Bob resolved that he would leave his band in the lurch, and fly up the range with his prize. Safer still, he might cross to some small Mexican town, drug her, and secure the service of a priest to marry them.

As for the major, he was satisfied that the band, when they found that he had deserted them, would make short work of their captive. If necessary, he would end the old man's career himself.

Red Eagle had passed entirely from the mind of Black Bob. It was different as regarded Boulder Bill, for the bandit chief had resolved that he would kidnap him, and torture him in the presence of Maude.

That would be the summit of revenge.

They should all three of his captives together, hear what his plot had been, and how successfully he had carried it out. This would be revenge most sweet and sweeping, and, at the mere thought of it, the fiendish laughter of the bandit leader would fill his cave-chamber. He never once entertained the thought that he might "slip up" on the business, in some particular point.

Major Malcolm was not naturally of a superstitious nature; but his confinement and misery had so worked upon his brain, that he believed himself to be the victim of a demon in human shape. And little wonder was it that he should have come to such a conclusion.

It was after dark on the ninth day after the sending of the latest telegram, when the spy from up the range arrived, and reported that Maude Malcolm would arrive the next day, or the following morning. Black Bob gave a yell of delight. All was working splendidly.

As the bandits had plenty of money, they had contented themselves gambling and drinking; having full confidence in the judgment of their chief, and therefore they never thought of grumbling at his order for them to lie low until the stage came.

Every necessary preparation was now made by the outlaws, to "hold up the hearse" at the same point as on the previous occasion.

Black Bob was certain that no force would be liable to meet them at that particular time, able to cope with them, unless his luck had greatly changed, which the bandit did not believe.

This was to be the grand effort, which was to give him a beautiful wife, or victim, and abundance of money. It would want but one thing

toward fulfilling his vow of vengeance, and that was the capture of Boulder Bill. This, he resolved, should follow immediately after the robbery; even if he should have to charge into the burg for the purpose, at the head of his masked band.

Thus we must leave the miscreant and his followers, while we record a few items in connection with our friends at Boulder City.

Boulder Bill was of opinion, from the fact that the outlaw chief had not kept the major in his power at the time of the robbery, but had allowed him to go free into the town, and tell his story, that this had been done purposely. It had been, in order that he should know the whole affair through Major Malcolm, and then be defeated in any attempt to make the old man his friend by the latter's being captured the same night. It showed also, to Will, in this way, the power of the masked man, who had warned him of his plot of revenge, even giving the main particulars.

The young man feared that the outlaw might be taking measures to lure Maude into his net.

Unfortunately, it had happened, each time the stage arrived, Boulder Bill had been absent, or perhaps Rattling Rob might have informed him of the contents of the message sent by the major; but it so happened, as well, that the driver was not made aware of the fact that the young man was a friend of Major Malcolm.

The Man from Taos had, agreeably to the request of Boulder Bill, gotten himself up in a new and showy rig in the clothing line; taking care to procure one as near like the costume of his new pard as was possible. He had also had his hair and beard trimmed, and he now looked like an entirely different man.

A great portion of the time after the fruitless search for the road agents was over, Bug-Juice Bill kept himself in the cavern, as has been said before, watching his bonanza; his pard, having at length decided that he would start for Denver on the following week.

It was the afternoon of the day, on the eve of which the spy from up the range brought Black Bob his intelligence, that the Man from Taos perceived a square of finely dressed fawn-skin, directly over the notice which had been written and posted by Boulder Bill.

There were painted characters upon it, one of which caused the miner to give a yell of delight, tear it from the rock, and hold it close to the torch. Then he ran at full speed from the cavern into the little vale, through the ravine, and up the range toward Boulder City, as if his life depended upon arriving at the burg at a certain time.

More like a madman than a sane being appeared Bug-Juice Bill as he darted around boulders, and among thickets; his giant form keeping up such speed and momentum, that it almost seemed as if a score of ordinary men would have been swept from his path-like chaff had they barred his way.

Boulder Bill, Long Horn, and a party of miners were standing in front of Booze Bazaar, and their attention was at once caught by the Man from Taos, as he dashed into the street.

"He looks as though something had struck him, and struck him hard," said Will.

"Crazy as a bed-bug!"

"Plum' off his cabase!"

"What's up wi' ther pilgrim from Taos?"

Such were the remarks of the others.

Pig Pretzel was also made aware of the approach of some one who was yelling like a maniac, but the stolid Dutchman's back was turned in that direction, and he did not at once comprehend from whence the sounds proceeded. When he did, and slowly turned, Bug Juice Bill had covered half the distance between the lower end of the street, and Boulder Hotel.

Pig Pretzel at once recognized the man. He had been frightened half to death, when the miner had recovered after the scene with the Apache, and his terror at seeing him now rushing headlong toward him was so great, that he was incapable of moving a muscle.

The consequence was that Bug-Juice Bill had nearly reached the landlord before the latter had recovered sufficiently to utter his terror, and run, as fast as his legs could carry him, to his shebang.

It was no use, however; for, with a piercing cry, the Man from Taos, in a few mad bounds, reached the rear of the terrified Dutchman, caught him by the collar and belt, lifted him from the ground, and, in a moment after, set Pig Pretzel astride of "Beauty."

Then the giant miner gave a peculiar yell, and away up the street, at terrific speed, dashed the mule; the appalled proprietor of Boulder Hotel clutching the animal's ears, his legs clinging about the flanks of the beast, Pig Pretzel himself outstretched on Beauty's back, with his red face close to the mule's neck.

Thus man and mule shot, up the rise, toward the point where the stage had been robbed, as the landlord but too well knew; his terror thus being doubled, for he stood in horror of the "plack maskers."

Boulder Bill, Long Horn, and their companions, although amazed and concerned at the actions and manner of the Man from Taos, were convulsed with laughter at the truly comical

sight. But their laughter was of short duration, for straight toward them bounded Bug-Juice Bill, yelling still more furiously.

"Git, boyees! He'll corral us. Dod-bing an' dog-gone ther crazy coot!"

"He'll sling we-uns all a-top o' Booze Bazaar!"

"Ya-as; er clean up ther peaks."

With such outcries, the men all rushed into the bar; even Boulder Bill being dragged, by Long Horn and others, inside; for the young man was determined to stand his ground, and endeavor to quiet his pard.

The door was quickly shut and locked, all at the same time springing away from it; and it was well that they did, for, like a huge battering-ram, the giant miner struck the door with tremendous force, sending it flying inward with a crash.

Bug-Juice Bill fell with it and upon it. Then he yelled:

"Jump onter me, boyees, quick—ther hull on yer! Hold me down, er I'll smash ther hull burg ter flinders! Sling a bar'l o' water over my head, er hit'll bu'st, dead sure an' sartin!"

Before these words were finished, a man sat on each arm and leg, with Boulder Bill at his pard's head, holding it down.

But they were all convinced, by the joyous expression, which merged into wild laughter, that the Man from Taos was not excited by anything of a tragic nature or from an over-indulgence in strong beverages.

"Gi'n me a snifter o' whisk', Long Horn; an', boyees, let me up! Pard Boulder Bill, gi'n me a leetle room fer a run, an' I'll make a clean jump over ther tip-top peaks; an' I'll jump back ag'in to yer, I'll promise yer thet!"

"In the name of wonder and common-sense, what in the dickens is the difficulty with you this time, Bentley?" asked Will, with a shade of impatience.

"I kin tell yer in a few wags o' tongue, pard!"

"Wag away, then?"

"Boulder Bill, yer war right, an' ther hull o' us war blasted fools! Red Eagle war true as steel. Ther 'Pache air somewhar 'bout ther burg, an' Nannie an' ther leetle boy air O. K., like ther red fu'st asserwated!"

"Thank God!" burst from the young man's lips, with sincerity, relief inexpressible, and the deepest feeling.

A wild cheer rung from Long Horn and the miners, who now released their hold upon the Man from Taos.

The latter sprung to his feet and spread the piece of fawn-skin out upon the bar, pointing out the characters on it as he said:

"I hain't gut no edicache, but I kin read thet, which air more'n one o' yer bestest skule-bosses kin do—I'll gamble befty on thet! Pards, I wouldn't swap thet fawn-skin fer a Gov'ment bond callin' fer a hundred thousand dollars!"

All stared at it with much curiosity, puzzled greatly at the strange characters and rude pictures that were daubed upon it.

CHAPTER XXX.

DECIPHERING THE HIEROGLYPHICS.

THE curiosity and wonder of the crowd was unbounded, as they gazed at the piece of fawn-skin, which had been spread upon the bar slab by the Man from Taos.

"What does all this mean, pard?" asked Will Stone in a puzzled manner. "You say that Red Eagle is in the town. Why does he not show up?"

"It is the best piece of news I have heard in a long time; and I am greatly pleased, and relieved also, in regard to the news that has run you wild with joy. But I do not exactly understand matters. Have you seen the Apache?"

"If so, tell us when and where; and what is the meaning of these daubs you are exhibiting? I can make no sense out of the thing whatever. Can you, gentlemen?"

"I mought, ef I hed time ter study onter 'em awhile," answered Long Horn. "Hit's some dang'd Injua writin'; leastways, thet's ther only way ther reds hev o' writin'."

"I hain't seed Red Eagle, but he's 'roun' hyeraways, fer all thet," asserted Bug-Juice Bill, very decidedly; as Boulder Bill cast a glance into his face, which was a reminder of his question.

"But explain, pard; how do you know he is here; and, if you have not seen him, how do you know that your wife and boy were not killed, as you have always supposed?"

"I knows by ther paint-daubs on thet skin, pard Bill. Hit's es plain es ther big cracks in ther range. Gi'n me a show thar, boyees, an' I'll 'terpret ther pictur's."

Room was cleared, at the bar, for the Man from Taos; and with Boulder Bill on his right, and Long Horn on his left, the miners closing around, Bug Juice Bill proceeded to explain the meaning of the rude drawings upon the fawn-skin.

On the left-hand upper corner was a rude sketch of a log-cabin; smoke issuing from the same in masses; proving that the dwelling had been fired. Opposite this were figures which,

although far from being natural, were made to represent a party of Indians, among whom crouched a female clasping the hand of a child.

The right arm of both woman and boy were stretched upward, as if to ward off the blows of the knives and tomahawks, which were raised, by the on rushing braves, to slay them.

A warrior, however, stood between his comrades and the captives, holding up one hand, as if to warn them back; while the other hand, with dexter finger extended, pointed to the up-raised arms of the kneeling pair.

Around these arms of the captive could be distinguished an imitation of a snake which was coiled about each. Above this, was a full moon.

The picture seemed to represent a massacre. In the background were other Indians, dragging forward another woman and child; the latter being about the same size as the little one in the foreground.

"Thet, boyees," explained the Man from Taos, "air ther 'Pache war-party burnin' my ranch, an' 'bout ter kill Nannie an' ther kid; an' hit 'splains why they war not hashed, es I war dead sure they war."

Bentley hesitated, full of emotion and gratitude at the thoughts that ruled him.

"I can't see the point, pard," said Boulder Bill.

"I know hit's ormighty strange, boyees. Yer see I knows a heap 'bout ther red varmints an' bein' located nowhar, an' ther cusses mought run in on me, an' clean me out, I one day thought I'd jest rub some wet powder onter Nannie's arm, an' prick hit in, formin' a rattle-snake right 'round her arm, which I did. Then, arter ther kid war a few months old, I marked another crawler onter his leetle arm."

"Yer see, ther Nav'hoes an' 'Paches thinks a rattler air Big Medicine; an' they uses ther pesky varmints in thar 'ligious sairy-money; an' thet war what I war thinkin' on, when I put ther snakes onter Nannie's an' ther leetle boy's arms. But I sw'ar hit war only a notion, an' I didn't s'pose ary good 'u'd come o' hit."

"Howsomever, hit saved thar lives, es ther picturs talk. Ther oman an' kid back thar, what thar reds air draggin' up, war hashed a purpose ter make me think they war what 'longed ter me. They war so backed up, nobody c'u'dn't tell ther differ."

"Yer see, I hed laid out some on ther 'Paches fer freezin' onter my nags, an' they war arter revenge, but, arter seein' ther snake totems, they dassen't kill 'em fer fear ther Good Spirit 'u'd sen' sickness 'mong 'em."

"Hit's all es plain es ther snoot on yer phyce—Red Eagle even drawin' ther full moon es 'twar that night."

On the opposite, or right hand upper corner, was another picture; representing, in a rude manner, a mount inclosed valley, within which were the tepees of an Indian village. A woman and child, hand in hand, were pictured; their profiles outlined to distinguish them as white, while the heads of the squaws and papposes were filled in entirely with color. Upon hands and knees, up the mountain-side, peering down upon the scene below, was an armed Indian, three plumes upon his head. The moon over this sketch, was represented as between first quarter and full.

"Thar," explained Bentley, "is ther 'Pache village whar Nannie an' ther kid air captives, an' yer kin see 'em walkin' outside. 'Bove, on ther mountain, yer kin see a Injun spyin' down on ther village. Thet's Red Eagle; jist ther sorter human, I sw'ar, thet yeou, Boulder Bill, sot him up fer, though I c'u'dn't see hit thet-away, nor ther boyees neither."

"Ther moon war et fust quarter, when ther 'Pache levanted, an' ther way he's drawed thet, hit tuck him 'bout three days ter git ter ther place. He war a-buffin' it, but I reckon, on good critters, we-uns c'u'd make ther 'Pache lay-out, in one sun, an' a leetle inter ther dark."

There was still another rude drawing, which represented a town of shanties, above which a full moon shone. On a boulder, near the base of the range, stood an Indian chief.

Pointing to this sketch, the Man from Taos continued:

"Thet's Boulder City. Thar's Red Eagle, on ther rock. An' last night was full moon. Consekently ther 'Pache 'roved last night, drawed this, crawled into my camp when I war in a dead snooze an' left hit. Dang me, ef I don't hev hit put inter a gold frame, an' Nannie won't 'low ther dust ter gather onter hit neither!"

"Ain't hit 'bout es plain es book printin', boyees, when yer tumbles to hit?"

"It is wonderful," said Boulder Bill. "Pard, I congratulate you! This is indeed miraculous. Your dear ones, if we succeed in rescuing them, of which I have no doubt, will be as though they had come back from the dead. Well done, Red Eagle!"

"Ya-as," said Long Horn; "but hit's 'Pache cussedness what put him to hit. He's hankered fer revenge on his own tribe, fer runnin' him off loose es a renegade; an', 'sides thet, he's bound ter hev Black Bob's scalp, fer shootin' him. Thet's 'Pache all over."

"He's hed his own leetle hatchet ter grind, all

through; an' hit's lucky fer our Taos pard hyer thet he hes. But everythin's comin' out O'K. Le's pison ourselves on this! What'll yer hev, pard?"

Joyously the boss of Booze Bazaar slid out glasses and bottles.

"But why doesn't Red Eagle show himself?" questioned Boulder Bill. "Thet part of it looks strange to me. Is he afraid of his life, notwithstanding all our assurances of friendship?"

"He's movin' 'round, eager ter find out 'bout Black Bob," suggested Long Horn.

"Thet's hit, yer kin bet yer ducats!" agreed Bug-Juice Bill; "an' I opine he's afraid I'll start him on ther guide arter Nannie an' ther kid, on ther jump; which he doesn't want ter do ontil he's skinned Black Bob's head."

"Thet's what's ther matter wi' ther 'Pache, an' he's smart ter keep close, fer he's jist kerrect. I shell be plum lunitied ontil I gits on ther trail."

"How many men do you think will be required to make a dash into that Apache village?" asked Boulder Bill.

"Nary one, 'ceptin' Red Eagle an' me. Ef we tuck more they'd be in ther way, an', like enough, spile all ther biz. Hit'll be all fine scoutin' on the sly clear through, an' no shootin' 'lowed."

"Ther 'Paches must be foun'," put in Long Horn, quickly. "Ther cuss kin guide us ther Bag-Slashers cave, an' then we'll know dead sure, ef Black Bob hev levanted up er down range."

"You are right, Long Horn," agreed Will.

"We must push right into business now. Red Eagle must be found to pilot us to the cave. If the outlaws have departed, which seems to be the case, we'll go at once to the rescue of Bill Bentley's wife and child."

"You shall not play a lone game, pard. It's too risky business to attempt the rescue as you propose. Besides what could you do toward defending your long lost ones, if those red fiends should follow your trail after discovering that their captives had been taken from them? Why, man, they'd torture you all in that case!"

"It was, indeed, providential that the tattooing was the means of saving their lives. It is wonderful, but it might not save them the second time."

"I'll postpone my trip to Denver until your wife and child have been rescued. They are more to be considered than anything or anybody else, not excepting Major Malcolm."

"Thank yer, pard Bill," said the Man from Taos, extending his hand; "thet's solid white talk. But I asserwates thet no crowd c'u'd git Nannie an' ther leetle boy. Some o' ther bellyuns 'u'd git a peep et us, er strike our sign, an' then ther hull biz 'u'd go ter smash."

"A few, air a heap better'n many, ter glide into a 'Pache lay-out on sly biz. 'Sides we c'u'd take ter ther rocks, an' keep off a heap o' red devils with our shooters, ef they follered us."

"But, es yer says, boyees, Red Eagle hev gut ter be hunted an' found, afore anythin' kin be did. I sw'ar, I'm so cbuck-full o' glad, I c'u'd chaw off ther tip-top peaks, an' spit 'em clean inter Colorado!"

"Long Horn, I'll take ale, like my pard, Bill. Nary drap o' bug-juice fer Bentley, onter Nannie an' ther kid sots on my knees; an' then, I'll touch ther p'ison ormighty light, ef any. Whisk' hes gut ther bestest o' me frequent an' often, since ther black clouds shut out ther sunshine o' life ter me; but ther sun's peepin' through now, an' I ain't goin' ter git blind drunk, so I can't see ther blessin's what air bein' showered down onter my trail."

"Good for you, pard! Shake again," said Boulder Bill. "If any clouded sky only gets clear to match yours when the wife and boy are with you once more, then I can rejoice indeed."

"There are bright and golden prospects ahead, I hope, for both of us—yes, and for all in Boulder City!"

"'Rah fer Boulder Bill!" was the loud-yelled and repeated outcry of the miners.

Touching the brim of his sombrero in acknowledgment, our young friend, seeming never to forget, for any length of time, one in distress, broke forth, with a half-amused expression:

"Pards, what will become of Pig Pretzel? That mule will carry him into Colorado. Will it not, Bentley?"

"Not by a jug-full! I'm bettin' we'll see 'em comin' inter ther burg, down-grade, jist a kit-in'. Le's gaze!"

And to the door all rushed, roars of laughter filling the air, as they stepped over the threshold; for, as Bug-Juice Bill had predicted, down the decline, at a fearful rate of speed, dashed "Beauty," the mule, Pig Pretzel upon its back! The arms of the unhappy Dutchman were clasped tightly around the animal's neck, his red face was even redder than before, and his eyes were sticking out in abject terror.

A most comical sight it was, and even our friend, Boulder Bill, although he felt sorry for the unfortunate landlord, could not control his laughter.

Having been the cause of poor Pig's uncomfortable condition and fright, the Man from Taos decided to get the Dutchman out of the scrape without injury. He therefore ran across the street, into Boulder Hotel, giving a peculiar whistle at the door of that hostelry.

This caused "Beauty" to turn, and dart into the bar-room, halting; when Pig Pretzel, none the worse physically for his un-ought ride, was assisted from the animal to his feet.

The boss of Boulder Hotel, panting and blowing like a porpoise, gazed in dread from the mule to its master; then he uttered a single ejaculation, in a half-choked voice, as he rushed behind his bar. There was deep meaning in the few words of mingled terror, amazement and relief:

"Undred to'usan' tuffyils!"

It is probable that poor Pig Pretzel considered the Man from Taos and his mule fully equal to that number of demons, when they both got on a "rampage" at the same time.

Boulder Hotel rung with laughter, and Pig Pretzel, very gladly "set 'em up," it being but a brief space of time before he recovered the use of all his faculties, and joined in the laugh, from policy, and to lessen the continuance of the hilarity and ridicule of the "cits."

Half an hour afterward, all those who were not hard at work in the mines, were searching along the range for "sign" of Red Eagle—the man of all men, Apache though he was, at that time, with the denizens of Boulder City.

CHAPTER XXXI.

TWICE TAKEN.

LONG before sunrise on the morning following the fruitless search made by the miners for the outlaws, Black Bob descended from the cave to the base of the cliff, where he called his followers, and addressed them.

"Boys," said the bandit leader, in a ringing voice, "the time has at last arrived for another dash at the old 'bears.' I must tell you why we have remained so long inactive. You remember that I allowed this captive of ours to go free into the burg, and then had Red Eagle snatch him the same night."

"Everything went lovely, as I expected, for I went into Boulder Hotel in disguise, taking the next sleeping-hole to this same old gentleman. There I heard him read two telegrams, which he sent by Rattling Rob to be dispatched."

"One was to his banker's in St. Louis, instructing them to forward him ten thousand dollars; the other was to his daughter, directing her to start at once for Boulder City, bringing with her twenty thousand dollars. How is that for high?"

"The daughter, Cheeky Charley reports, will arrive on the stage this morning. Now you know what kind of a game I've been playing. We have next to watch for Boulder Bill, as they call him here."

"He doesn't know that this young lady is coming, or he'd have the trail lined with men; for he intends to make her his wife—if he can. But, boys, my little game not only rakes a pile for us, but cheats Boulder Bill of his bride; for I have sworn that she shall be the queen of the Bag-Slashers—the wife of Black Bob, your chief."

"Three cheers an' a tiger for Black Bob, ther King o' ther Roekies!" yelled Big Buck.

"Easy, boys," said the outlaw leader, "make your howls low, for there may be keen ears within hearing."

But the bandits were reckless. They believed that they could even dash through and "run," for a while, Boulder City to suit themselves; and they cared not if lurkers did hear their yells, for they did not believe the alarm could be given in time to prevent their proposed object from being accomplished.

Although Black Bob had revealed the fact that he was almost sure of making a haul of thirty thousand dollars, he had no intention of dividing the same among his men. His object in telling his band that there was a "big stake" to gain, was but to prepare them for what would very possibly be a desperate fight.

Soon the men were in readiness, each wearing a black mask. Big Buck and Monkey were left as guard—the former at the gulch entrance, the latter at the arched passage before described.

Keen and suspicious as were the glances of the outlaws through their pierced masks, yet none of them caught a glimpse of one who crouched in the thicket on one side of the gulch. This was none other than Red Eagle, the Apache renegade!

As he sprung erect, after the bandits had passed around a spur of rock, his form and head proudly poised, his eagle-feathers yet flaunting and unbroken, he swore by the spirits of his fathers to have vengeance upon the outlaw chief who, after he had guided him to a secure retreat, had attempted his life.

He had accomplished his self-imposed mission.

It had been sufficient for him to know that Bug-Juice Bill was a friend to the man who had bravely risked his life to save him from the grizzly bear, for him to resolve to do the Man

from Taos a favor; as he saw no ready opening to prove his gratitude to Boulder Bill in any other way. This, as we have said, he had done; hardly sleeping or eating one-half that nature demanded while on his way to the Apache village.

Returning he had stolen into the Bonanza cavern while Bug-Juice Bill slept, to leave the fawnskin with its hieroglyphics, having discovered the trail of Bill's mule into the little mountain oasis.

It was as the Apache stealthily approached the gulch entrance to the caverns that he discovered the outlaw band emerging from the *motte* pines into and down the gulch. Crouching down, he waited for the bandits to pass from view. Then he sprang at once to his feet, his eyes blazing with the war-spirit of his people.

But Red Eagle was now in a very perplexing position.

He had resolved to rescue the white-haired man, the friend of Boulder Bill, and whom he himself had captured.

The departure of the bandits made this possible but he knew, at the same time, that he ought to speed at once to Boulder City and notify Boulder Bill of the departure of the outlaws, with the evident intention of robbing the coach.

Red Eagle, by consulting his fingers, in thinking of the days past, knew the coach was due that morning; consequently, there was no doubt in his mind as to the object of the Bag-Slashers. He felt assured that none but Big Buck and Monkey Mose had been left at the retreat.

The Apache hesitated but a little time, but made his way to the base of the cliff. Then, keeping himself shielded from view, he wormed his way up the gulch, taking advantage of every bush and boulder.

Soon he stood within the pines that hid from view the dark, arched passage into the little vale. Here he paused to listen, but no sound met his ears, nor could he see any one at the outer entrance of the passage. Drawing his scalping-knife, the Apache darted into the little vale.

With every sense and muscle strained, Red Eagle, knowing full well that a bullet would pierce his vitals instantly upon being discovered, stole on. He did not wish to shoot Monkey Mose, for the sound would alarm Big Buck, and might defeat his plan.

Keeping close to the rock wall, Red Eagle, ready for a terrific bound, crept forward until the bright daylight and the green carpet of the vale were before him. Still no sign of Monkey Mose.

Within a few feet of the outer edge of the arched opening he halted and listened. In a moment he heard the tread of a booted man upon the soft sward—sounds which few ears could have detected. The tread was slow and sauntering, and the scent of tobacco-smoke was blown toward the nostrils of the Apache chief. Then he knew that Monkey Mose had been to the camp-fire to light his pipe.

Another instant, and out from the arched passage shot Red Eagle, directly upon the doomed Monkey Mose, the left hand of the Indian clutching the bandit's throat, while at the same moment, grating through flesh and bone, the long scalping-knife was plunged to the buck-horn into the breast of the doomed outlaw, whose terror-filled eyes soon filmed in death, as the knife was jerked out from his vitals, and an arch of blood spurted and fell pattering over grass and flowers!

With a suppressed whoop of victory Red Eagle circled his knife around the head of his victim and tore off the reeking scalp while yet the spasms of death contorted the form of the ill-starred Monkey Mose.

Hurling the corpse from him, Red Eagle, now doubly furious and bloodthirsty, sprang up the steep path through the pines to the cavern, and into it.

He now felt positive that none except Big Buck stood in his way, but the latter was a giant in size and strength.

Yet the Apache did not think it prudent to shoot, for the outlaws might be returning, having abandoned the search.

Not a living soul was in the huge main cavern, and lamps were burning.

Silent as a spirit, the savage glided across the rock floor and along the narrow tunnel toward the exit into the gulch.

Here there were no lights, and he was in no danger of being seen, as he neared the blanket-covered opening. Upon arriving near, as he knew, to the opening, Red Eagle paused and listened intently, but not the slightest sound met his ear, though the tell-tale tobacco-smoke proved that Big Buck was not far distant.

The Apache knew, after a moment's consideration, that the bandit giant had passed out on the shelf of rock; probably being now seated on the edge of the same, and smoking.

The pines at this point found root to the very edge of the shelf; and the side of the cliff was sheer down, full seventy feet to the bed of the gulch.

All this was impressed upon Red Eagle's mind, and slowly he lifted the corner of the blankets and peeped out.

Big Buck was not to be seen.

The branches hid the bandit from view, this proving that he must be on the very edge of the dizzy height.

Instantly the Apache chief crawled beyond the blankets, and beneath the branches of the first pines.

Not a moment was to be lost. Everything—life and death, the rescue of the old man—depended upon a single instant.

Should the slightest whisk of branch betray his presence, the Indian knew that his fate would be sealed; and the white-haired captive, the friend of Boulder Bill, might also be doomed.

No snake could have moved with more caution and less sound, and quickly Red Eagle saw Big Buck, as he believed, seated upon the verge of the pines and the awful height.

Not an instant did the Indian delay; but cautiously rising erect he gathered his strength, and bounding forward, sprang into the air, then downward at an angle, his feet striking the shoulders of the giant outlaw with terrible force.

The whole weight and strength of Red Eagle were brought to bear, in the effort that would be life to him and the white-haired captive and death to Big Buck, or *vice versa*.

With a fearful cry of horror, the gigantic bandit was buried by the shock from the shelf of rock and shot down the awful height, to be dashed into a mangled mass upon the jagged rocks afar below, even his bones being crushed!

So great had been the effort of Red Eagle that he came very near shooting, feet first, over to his death also, nothing saving him but the clutching of a strong bough. For a moment or two he lay upon his back before he began the struggle upward.

Then he gave one glance below.

But there was no need.

A wild cry of victory burst from his lips.

He cared not now for the return of the outlaws, for escape was open by the cliff exit should they enter the arched passage and the vale.

Without hesitation the brave bounded back into the cavern, and tore a light from the wall. He then rushed into the cave-chamber of Black Bob.

The captive was not there, but a heavy groan indicated his position in a chamber adjoining.

Into this Red Eagle darted.

Before him, bound hand and foot, was the old man whom he had captured, but whom he now proposed to liberate.

The Indian severed the lariats quickly, caught up the emaciated major, threw him over his shoulder, and then darted from the cavern and out upon the shelf, from which he had hurled Big Buck.

The narrow shelf led both upward and downward to the gulch-bed; but Red Eagle, with the major over his shoulder, rushed upward for some distance and then downward, and in a very little time was speeding down the gulch-bed, keeping a sharp lookout ahead.

Fifteen minutes afterward, the Apache renegade might have been seen, with his burden—a living, but terrified, human being, Major Malcolm—dashing down the range, between the foot-hills, and toward Boulder City.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ANOTHER TURN OF THE WHEEL.

CHEEKY CHARLEY had not reported falsely to his chief, for it had been Maude Malcolm, whom he had seen on the coach, at the station in Fountain City.

From Rattling Rob, the young lady had learned all the circumstances in connection with the stage robbery, and the capture the following night of her father; also that the major had not yet been rescued, and it was believed in Boulder City that the bandits were no longer in the vicinity.

Then Maude made inquiries in regard to William Stone.

As the driver knew the "States" name of the young man, he at once "tumbled" to the true state of affairs, and gave his fair passenger all the intelligence at his command, and which we already know. Hope now dawned upon her, for she believed that Will would move the earth, so to speak, to save her father, from the infamous villain, who had already so deeply wronged him. Her relief, too, was so much the greater, from her having feared that Robertson had slain her lover, in accordance with his threat.

She was, also, not without apprehensions on her own account; fearing that this miscreant, who had proved himself such an arch-plotter, would attack the coach; and, to gain his sworn revenge, would condemn her to a fate far worse than death.

One thought of his evil glance, as recalled when in her father's house, was sufficient to cause her to shudder. What, then, would be her dread position as his captive?

But, through the decided assertions of Rattling Rob, in regard to the departure of the outlaws, and his belief that the band was now

far away, all personal fear vanished; yet her anxiety for her father increased tenfold. Her great trust, however, was in Will Stone.

The driver had not the slightest suspicion that the coach would be "held up," but, should such an event occur, he swore mentally that he would shoot, and shoot to kill, as long as a charge remained in his revolvers.

The passengers for Boulder City, on this trip, were far different men from those on the previous occasion. They were six in number—two riding outside, as they wished to smoke—and were all rough, but honest mountain men, who knew no fear; but always went prepared.

Eventually, the Concord coach rolled, at speed, over the steep, and toward the rocky range; toward, also, a skulking band of masked miscreants, who were now swearing fearfully, because their spy upon one of the hills, had failed to signal the appearance of the "hearse," for so long a time after it ought to have been in view.

Up to this time, everything connected with Black Bob's villainous scheming had run smoothly, and this little delay, not only worried him, but worked upon his naturally superstitious nature, causing him to entertain a suspicion that his luck was about to change.

Just such a suspicion had he entertained, after having left Red Eagle senseless from his bullet; he fearing that the Apache would betray him to the "cits," but time had passed, and this apprehension had vanished.

The delay of the coach, however, was a serious affair. Black Bob was satisfied that it would have a depressing effect upon his men, working them into an impatient, excited state, which would cause them to be of less service, should there be occasion for a fierce fight.

Thus the bandits awaited the oncoming coach, while Maude Malcolm, in eager conversation with the rough miners, related her troubles, and fears and hopes; thereby gaining the warm regard of all, they being ready to form themselves into a body-guard, if necessary, for her defense.

Black Bob's apprehensions were not unfounded.

The movements of Red Eagle, while stealing upon Big Buck and Monkey Mose, had been necessarily slow; but after he had dispatched both these bandits "over the range," and caught up Major Malcolm, he ran like a deer. All this he had accomplished before the Bag-Slashers had reached their place of ambush.

In a very short space of time, the Apache covered more than two-thirds of the distance between the big gulch and Boulder City. Then he shot to the eastward, and was soon bounding down the stage trail toward the burg, the rise behind him, and the boulders and pines between the range and the hill having shielded him from the view of the outlaws.

When Red Eagle reached such a distance, as he knew to be within hearing of the town, the wild whoop, both of warning and victory, shot from his lips. It was sufficiently startling.

The "cits" and miners, with Boulder Bill and the Man from Taos in the lead, rushed out, and stood amazed at the strange sight.

Red Eagle, the Apache renegade, had at length "turned up."

But who was the apparently dead man who was held in the arms of the Apache?

Will Stone was the first to guess the truth—in fact he was confident that Red Eagle had rescued Major Malcolm. The Man from Taos was, however, the first to reach the Indian, who greeted him calmly as ever.

"Good. Red Eagle brother of Bug-Juice Bill. No time talk. Heap time fight soon. War-path open. Waugh!"

Not noticing the significance of the Apache's words, Bentley laid hold of the major, relieving Red Eagle of his burden, and at that moment Boulder Bill rushed up, extending his hand to the chief, glancing at Major Malcolm, and then into the face of the Indian, as he said, with deep feeling:

"May the Great Spirit bless you, Red Eagle! You have proved yourself a noble and true man."

"Good. Red Eagle proud have Boulder Bill his friend. No time talk. Get horse, quick. Look!"—pointing up the trail—"Black Bob, he there. Wait for coach."

The two men were unable to speak for a moment, when suddenly the Indian sprang into the air, and gave a far-sounding whoop of war. Then he called out:

"Hear guns. War-path open. Black Bob scalp shall hang at Red Eagle's belt. Waugh! It is good. Come!"

And sure enough the reports of carbines reached the ears of our two friends.

There was no time now to waste in getting their horses. Already Red Eagle was speeding up the trail, and, with a wild yell and a gesture to the crowd below, Boulder Bill rushed after the Indian up the stage trail; the Man from Taos hastily laying Major Malcolm, who had become senseless from his great fear of the Apache and his extreme weakness of body and mind, upon the roadside.

Bug-Juice Bill then dashed, with a wild whoop, on after his white and red pards.

The miners and "cits," who had also caught a faint sound of the guns in the clear morning air, stampeded after, scattering along the trail.

All had revolvers and bowies in their hands and were yelling like fiends.

It began to look as though there might be some grounds for Black Bob's gloomy forebodings.

"Coming events"—especially disastrous ones—quite frequently "cast their shadows before."

CHAPTER XXXIII. KEEPING HIS OATH.

No sooner had the Concord coach dashed in among the foot-hills, when Maude Malcolm became suddenly depressed and apprehensive.

Her manner and words to the rough men who were her fellow-passengers, had made a strange impression upon them. She seemed so far above them, that when they saw her sudden depression of spirits, they became themselves apprehensive that all might not be right; influenced in this, by the reasoning that such an innocent young girl might, or ought to be, warned of danger in some unknown way.

In consequence of this, they kept their revolvers ready, although they assured Maude that there was no occasion for alarm; asserting that if the coach was attacked, they could easily defend her against any one-horse band of road-agents, who might have the audacity to show themselves.

But when Maude informed them that Black Bob had twenty ruffians in his command—that Rattling Rob had assured her of this fact—then they were greatly surprised, and not so confident of "standing off" such a crowd.

The driver felt that a great responsibility rested upon him. He had the loveliest girl on board that had ever blessed his vision; and he vowed that he would take her through to Boulder City, or lose his life trying.

So anxious was he in regard to not causing his fair passenger any further anxiety, that he kept tight reins, and allowed his whip to remain in its socket; going slowly, lest Maude might be frightened in dashing past the dangerous bowlders.

Thus proceeded the stage, along the winding trail, toward the point where death lurked on either side; and Rattling Rob pointed out ahead to the two miners in his rear the place where the "hearse" had been "hauled up," explaining how the bandit had sprung from the bowlder, and knocked him senseless.

"Dang'd ef I kin see airy bowlder!" said one of his listeners.

"I'll show yer whar bit air," returned Bob, as he clutched his revolver, raising it, and aiming directly at the point whence the giant outlaw had bounded, and pulled trigger.

A loud report followed, and then a yell of mortal agony; as, out from the pine branches sprung the same huge bandit, his form shooting downward, and striking the earth with a thud. To describe the astonishment of the passengers would be impossible. The driver himself, was dumfounded.

Whether the bullet had been providentially directed on its errand of death, the reader must judge from the complications that originated through that chance shot.

Rattling Rob at once felt positive that the Bag-Slashers were again on hand, and he immediately kicked brakes. This, however, was hardly necessary; for the "leaders," affrighted at the corpse of the dead outlaw, at once halted, rearing and snorting. This brought all to a dead stop, which the driver realized was a good thing; for, he was well assured that he could not run the gantlet through the band of Black Bob, especially as the corpse of the outlaw would cause the team to sheer, and thus, without doubt, wreck the coach against the bowlder.

A moment more, and into the trail ahead, from each side, shot the masked riders, Black Bob at their head, and facing toward the coach.

Every bandit leveled his revolver, as the leader yelled:

"Hands empty, and up! Or we'll bore your brain-boxes!"

Not until Rattling Rob thought of the maiden in the coach, and his vow that he would protect her with his life, did it occur to him what was best to be done. Then, raising his revolver, he cried out, to those in his rear:

"Pull triggers, pards, an' jump to brush!"

Instantly the three revolvers spouted fire and lead, and the next moment Rob and the two passengers sprung over the side of the coach; but, even as they braced for the jump, fingers pressed triggers among the bandit band, and a shower of lead cut the air, tearing through the trio as they were in the air, and through the seat and the top of the coach.

Black Bob knew, as well as his followers, that they were in a dangerous position, as soon as the report of the revolver rung in their ears, and their comrade fell from the bowlder; all believing that he had been discovered, and that the stage was filled with fighters.

This nerved them to desperate action, as did the words of their leader, before charging from covert. These were:

"Kill every man who resists, but look out

and not harm the woman! Go for express-box and mail, and git for the cave! Duncan and Cheeky Charley, you two attend to this!"

Thus the order was given, but the coach was below the bowlder.

All had fired without orders, as soon as the bullets of the two "outsides" and the driver hurtled into their massed ranks, causing as many black masks to be torn in agony from faces that were contorted in death.

"Hell and furies!" yelled the bandit chief; "you've killed the woman, I'll bet my life! Surround the coach! Duncan and Charley, attend to biz!"

To return to the coach, however.

When Rattling Rob fired, one of the miners immediately thrust his head out, and leaned from the window, just in time to see the dead outlaw fall from the bowlder. Quickly he drew himself back inside, crying out:

"Maskers, pards, sure es shootin'! Draw an' defend ther lady! One on 'em's 'over the range'—Rob checked him through!"

Maude turned pale as death.

"Squat right down hyer, miss! We'll stan' by yer—bet yer bonnet!" called out one of the miners, and the poor maiden at once obeyed.

"Squat, pards!" yelled another; "squat, er git yer cabases perforated!"

Rapidly these words were spoken, as all crouched low, the thickets on either side of the trail preventing the outlaws from at once charging down, and surrounding the stage.

Hardly had the last speaker ended, when the terrible volley was fired by the bandits, the bullets tearing into the coach. Kicking open the doors, the passengers sprung to the ground, to see the driver and two of their pards lying dead beside the fore-wheels, while the horses were plunging and kicking to free themselves.

Ahead, in the road lay four bandits, evidently dead, while a great crashing of bushes betrayed the fact that the outlaws were surrounding them.

"Leave ther doors open!" directed one of the miners; "they can't see ther lady whar she air an' they'll know we're levanted. Then she won't git hurtled. Tate brush cluss ter ther trail, an' gi'n 'em merry Tophet!"

There was no time for further talk; and, as no sound came from the coach, all believed that Maude had retained her position, and was therefore comparatively safe.

Darting into the bushes that bordered the trail, the remaining passengers awaited the onslaught of the masked riders.

And not long had they to wait; for, crashing toward the coach, on each side, came the Bag-Slashers—not, for a moment, dreaming that the "insides" were between them and the stage. Neither did they know the number, or character, of those inside the "hearse," as but one had been seen, and but a slight glimpse having been obtained of him.

On they came, but the next moment a perfect pandemonium reigned around the coach. Bullets flew like rain, and Black Bob, his keen eyes sweeping everywhere, saw two of his followers fall, and then two others, before the deadly revolvers of the brave miners.

But soon, the latter saw that they had done all in their power, and but death awaited them, while they could not hope to save Maude from capture.

Leaving two of their number dead, and they all wounded more or less severely, they darted, keeping closely together, away from the trail, over the dead and dying victims of their skillfully aimed revolvers.

A volley of terrible oaths shot from the lips of Black Bob, as he saw the open doors of the coach; and he spurred toward it, halting a moment, as Cheeky Charley and Jim Duncan jerked the mail-bag and express box from beneath the driver's seat.

"Gallop to the cave, boys! Gallop for life!"

Such was their leader's order, but they needed it not; for they already saw, dashing down the road toward the coach, a body of men, revolvers in hand, Boulder Bill and the Man from Taos in the lead.

The face of Black Bob turned ghastly. His heart chilled with terror.

His band were nearly all dead, and the groans and curses of the dying sounded on all sides.

Maude Malcolm, the prize for which he had plotted so long and cunningly, seemed to be slipping from his toils, at the very moment he had expected to clutch her.

Driving spurs, with the look of a fiend stamped upon his face, the bandit chief dashed up to the coach, and peered inside. Then there came from his lips a yell of devilish triumph, and he stepped from the saddle into the coach door, leaning over the back seat.

Then followed a pistol-shot, as Maude, who had caught a glimpse of his face, fired quickly at him; but, with a taunting laugh, he dashed the weapon aside, caught the maiden in his arms, and regained his saddle, in spite of her shrieks and struggles. With a yell of exultation, he then spurred past the still struggling stage-horses, forcing his magnificent steed to bound over his dead followers, and holding Maude's form before him, as a shield against the revolvers of the citizens, that were leveled at him!

Boulder Bill was almost paralyzed.

"Come, Will Stone, and take your darling, if you can! I have kept my oath of revenge thus far. Remember, you come next!"

With another taunting yell, Black Bob drove spurs, and shot into the dark shades to the north; while poor Maude, uttering one piercing cry, fainted away!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE RENEGADE'S REVENGE.

RED EAGLE was not with his white pards. As the "cits" had reached the top of the rise, one of the equipped horses of a fallen bandit galloped wildly up from the scene of the fight, and the Indian caught the bridle-reins, and vaulted into the saddle. Then he cried out, pointing toward the range:

"It is not good. Black Bob he go to cave. Too long fight. Red Eagle go to cave. When Black Bob come, take scalp. It is good. Waugh!"

He then urged the affrighted animal down the western base of the rise.

When the bandit leader galloped from the stage, over the slain, with Maude Malcolm, held in his arms as a protection against the bullets of our friends, it was no wonder that Boulder Bill was, for the time, helpless and speechless.

Little less affected was the Man from Taos, and indeed the others, at the sight of such a beautiful maiden in the arms of the outlaw.

But the latter was now fairly trembling in his boots.

Two-thirds of his powerful band lay dead and dying in his rear.

This he well knew.

Ahead were Cheeky Charley and Jim Duncan, with the express-box and mail-bag.

For the last, he cared not; but he believed the ten thousand dollars, forwarded by Major Malcolm's bankers to have been expressed. He felt sure, too, that Maude had in her possession the twenty thousand dollars.

With this money, and the maiden, he would now escape. He would desert the remnant of his band. Then, his oath of vengeance would be accomplished, except the killing of Boulder Bill; but he knew that the young man would follow him, to the rescue of Maude. Then would be his opportunity. Now, however, he must speed to the cave.

Once inside, with the six of his men who remained, and Monkey Mose and Big Buck, the entrances could be defended. During the coming night, he could make his escape, with Maude and all the money he could secure.

His plans, thus made, seemed easy to carry out; and he cared not for those who had been slain in the attack on the coach. They had been merely his tools, and he would no longer need them.

But what of our friends, whom we left in the stage trail?

The Man from Taos was the first to speak.

"Pard," he exclaimed, "is ther yer leetle gal, thet ther cuss bev gut? How kin she hyer? She's gut ter be reskied, an' Black Bob shell be strung up a limb—I sw'ar hit, an' yer all hear me!"

"Scatter, pards, an' corch nags! Come, pard Bill; we-uns can't 'ford ter waste a minut'. Skute air ther word. Bleed an' revenge, ther war-cry!"

All, though nearly ready to drop with fatigue, rushed to carry out the directions of Bill Bentley, who now darted toward the stage; but Boulder Bill was ahead of him, knife in hand. Soon the horses were cut loose, and the two Bills were speeding headlong toward the range. Those of the miners, who could secure the horses of the slain bandits, dashed in to aid them in the pursuit of the Bag-Slashers; while there were a large number remaining, who were now joined by the defenders of the coach.

These explained all, and the bodies of their friends, with that of Rattling Rob, were placed in the "hearse," and the "cits" dragged it to Boulder City; the border designation of a stage-coach being, on this occasion at least, an appropriate one.

The wounded bandits were also taken to the burg, to serve, as Long Horn expressed it, as "game for a lynch picnic."

Many of the citizens now procured horses, and dashed up the range, to aid in cleaning out the remainder of the masked riders.

The wounded miners, who had so bravely defended the coach, were the heroes of the hour.

But, we must return to the center of attraction, the great gulch; following the red avenger, after he had mounted the horse of the slain bandit, and left his white pards. From the sounds of the fight, the Indian well knew that the passengers, were battling desperately; but he was confident, that the strong band of Black Bob would be the victors.

They would, however, be forced to gallop to their retreat, and Red Eagle was positive that the two "Bill Pards" would fast follow them. He therefore, expected assistance in carrying out the plans, which he formed when on the run up the rise.

Reaching the arched passage, the Apache left the horse, and then rushed back to the outer entrance. There, he quickly hurled rocks into the

passage, in a very short time walling up the entrance. This done, he made his way up to the shelf in the gulch wall, to the then only entrance to the caverns and vale.

From thence, the Indian gazed down in vengeful anticipation.

Not long had he to wait.

Soon, at terrific speed, up the gulch dashed Black Bob, with his beautiful, and now senseless, captive.

Red Eagle, with scalping-knife clutched, stood erect; an expression of triumph in his eyes, and on his paint-daubed face. He looked just what he was—a merciless and terrible foe to contend against.

Spurring his horse directly into the pines, that screened the now walled-up tunnel, the bandit chief slid from his saddle, with Maude in his arms.

He saw that the way was blocked, he supposed it to have been done by Buck and Mose, who must have feared an attack by the citizens.

Turning toward the other entrance, the miscreant saw, to his horror and fright, Boulder Bill and the Man from Taos, both coming at breakneck speed. In his abject terror, the dastard came near fainting. He knew that, as far as retaining the maiden in his power was concerned, the game was up. But there was no time for deliberation.

He must at once reach the cave.

Before his pursuers could gain such a distance as would give them a fair shot at the bandit, with their revolvers, he had darted from their view, into the pines. They gave a yell of baffled rage.

Had our friends, however, been able to gaze through the screen of pine branches, they would not have thus felt; for Black Bob rushed right into the arms of the man who had vowed by the spirits of his fathers, to wear his scalp in his belt—Red Eagle, the Apache renegade!

On dashed Boulder Bill, through the pines, catching up from the ground, and pressing to his breast, the form of Maude Malcolm!

Bentley followed close, crying out:

"Now everythin' 'ud be hunk, ef I only hed Nannie an' ther kid!"

Bearing the senseless girl in his arms, outside the *motte*, the young man mounted his horse, and his pard passed her up into his arms.

Just then, up the gulch, dashed a number of the "cits," having four of the bandits, bound, in their midst; the remaining two, Cheeky Charley and Jim Duncan, having evaded capture, and escaped with the treasure.

At the sound of an exultant war-whoop, all eyes now turned upward, when they beheld a strange sight.

This was Red Eagle, standing high upon the edge of a shelf of rock, above the clump of pines that concealed the entrance to the caverns; while, with hands bound behind his back, and forced upon his knees, the fingers of the Indian gathered in his hair, was Robert Robertson, or Black Bob!

All knew that the outlaw chief was doomed—that the renegade Apache would keep his oath!

Soon, with another whoop of triumph, Red Eagle jerked the miscreant to a standing position. Then, quick flashed the scalping-knife, and was plunged to the hilt in the breast of the bandit! As the vengeful savage withdrew his blade, the blood spurted out afar, in an arch, falling in drops of ruby spray in the sunlight.

A shriek of horror, agony and despair—the last cry of a lost soul—shot out over the awful height, appalling those who heard it!

They gazed spellbound upward, chained by a horrible fascination; and saw again the knife of the Apache circle about the head of his victim, and the reeking scalp torn away from the skull. This was followed by loud ringing whoops of war and exultation from Red Eagle.

Placing the corpse in a sitting posture upon the narrow shelf, to be the prey of buzzards, the Apache chief strode proudly along the rocky shelf, his eagle-feathers flaunting, and soon vanished from the view of our friends in the gulch.

Then all returned to Boulder City.

CHAPTER XXXV.

NANNIE AND THE KID.

THE men of Boulder City were in a frenzy of excitement. Their thirst for revenge had increased, after Major Malcolm and his daughter were brought into the burg.

Maude remained unconscious, and the major had been in nearly as deplorable a state, until he had been braced up by several doses of brandy, and informed of the daughter's arrival, and of the peril through which she had passed. Then he rallied, feeling that he had some hope left in life; and, when he was told that the Indian had rescued him from the cave of the bandits, at the risk of life, and also that the savage had slain Black Bob, his old clerk, he felt that his troubles had been miraculously banished. Were Maude but herself again, the old man would, he admitted, have every cause to be thankful.

Major had been prepared to meet Will Stone, or Boulder Bill, should he ever escape from the cave, by the taunts of Black Bob, in con-

nection with the young man and the major's daughter.

Robert-on had, in fact, revealed everything, with a view of torturing his captive, but the story of Maude and Will had not produced that effect. In the solitude of the cavern, when a captive to the bandit, Major Malcolm had thought much, hoping and praying that his daughter would secure for a husband the brave and daring young man who had rescued them both from the River Rover.

The captivity of the major had wrought a great change in him, and he decided that he would be the happiest man on earth could he be free and with Maude, even though every dollar he had in the world might be gone. Upon his recovery he had been told of the continuous search that Will had made for him, after he had been missed from the hotel, and of his dash after Black Bob, which resulted, with the assistance rendered by Red Eagle, in rescuing Maude and preventing the outlaw chief from making his escape with her.

The old man sought the first opportunity to thank Will, and then and there told him that he knew of the true state of affairs between him and Maude, and that he was only proud and happy at the prospects of his child.

Scarcely was this over when Boulder Bill was called upon, in his official capacity, to take charge of the "lynch picnic."

With the corpses of the passengers and poor Rattling Rob before them, there was no mercy in the breast of any one in Boulder City. We need not, however, dwell upon the scene that followed.

Suffice it to say that Long Horn and the Man from Taos, acting as deputies for Will, were principals in launching into eternity the four bandits who had been captured in retreat, and the four others who had been too badly wounded to get away.

All this time Red Eagle was conspicuous by his absence. The Apache had again mysteriously disappeared.

The citizens visited the caverns in a body, and took possession of all the useful articles they found there; quite a number of equipped horses, from which outlaws had been shot, being secured in the foot hills.

Had not the excitement been so intense, and he having so much to occupy his mind, there is no doubt that Bill Bentley would have levanted alone in search of that branch of the Apache tribe that held captive his wife and child. But surprises and strange occurrences were not at an end in Boulder City; and time would prove, and that shortly, that the gratitude felt by Red Eagle toward his white pards was to be further proven.

The joy of all, especially of Maude, her father and Will may possibly be faintly imagined, when, on the morning that followed the exciting events which have been recorded, they found that their party was to be increased in number by others who would be equally happy with themselves—far happier, indeed, for it was a happiness which, for more than a year, they had believed would never be theirs.

But to explain.

The Man from Taos had been sent for by his pard, who wished to introduce him to Maude, that young lady having been told of Bentley's recent discoveries in regard to his lost wife and child.

Scarcely had the introduction taken place when a new commotion was heard in the street, and Will Stone stepped outside the door, to behold a sight that overwhelmed him with joy and grief at the same time.

A woman and child, dressed in beaded skin costumes and moccasins, stood before him, while staggering in their rear was Red Eagle, the feathered shaft of an arrow projecting from his broad, painted breast. As the Indian perceived Boulder Bill, he pointed at the pair in front of him, saying:

"Nannie and Kid. Where Bug-Juice Bill? Red Eagle tongue not forked. Say Man from Taos squaw be free, Say boy be free. Look! It is good. Red Eagle bring when come. Hide in rocks. Apaches follow trail."

"When Red Eagle go for squaw and boy, brave shoot. See"—touching the arrow. "It is good. Red Eagle sing death song. Shake!"

The men of Boulder City all gathered around in sorrowful silence, realizing what was to follow.

Catching a glimpse of Bentley within the shanty, his back being toward the door, the Apache extended his hands, one to the wife, the other to the little son of the giant miner, and staggered with them into the dwelling.

"Waugh!" he exclaimed; "look Bug-Juice Bill! Red Eagle bring Nannie and Kid."

With a cry of wild joy, the Man from Taos whirled, and caught them in his arms.

"May ther Father of all bless yer forever, Red Eagle! Ther's all I kin say now."

The Apache muttered:

"Red Eagle soon see Good Spirit. Soon sing death-song. Shake!"—and the savage put out his hand to Maude—"Boulder Bill friend, brother of Red Eagle. Squaw from where sun come, she sister. It is good. Waugh!"

Maude perceived the arrow, saw what was

wrong, and grasped the hand of the dying Indian.

"What's thet, Nannie?" cried Bill Bentley. "Ther red shooted! By ther bleed o' Crockett, he's got ter live!"

As Maude Malcolm released the hand of the Apache, he stalked out into the street; poor Nannie Bentley following with his war-robe, which she had brought from the cave in which he had left her and her child, on the same night that the Man from Taos had found the "talking" fawnskin at his mine.

Boulder Bill strove to assist the chief, but the latter waved him aside.

The robe was spread upon the earth, the hair side downward; the other being covered with strange characters and figures, representing the life history of the chief, in deeds of daring, in the chase, and in war. All crowded around. Red Eagle was now the center of attraction.

Stepping upon his robe, with eyes turned skyward, he began, in wild guttural tones, his death-chant. This lasted for some time. Then, to the horror of all, he clutched the feathered end of the shaft with both hands, and thrust the arrow entirely through his body; the head projecting from his back. Reaching behind, he then seized the point, and drew the weapon clear from his body, letting it fall upon the robe.

The blood spurted from both back and breast—a terrible sight to behold!

For a moment, the proud form of the Apache stood erect, his eagle-feathers flaunting. Then jerking his scalping-knife from his belt, he circled it in the air, over his then trembling plumes; and shot out, with horrible intonation, the war-cry of his people.

As the sound left his lips, the blood burst out in two great streams, and the bronzed brave sunk to his knees, and then upon his back, stretching himself upon his robe and folding his arms.

A gurgling death-cry followed, and Red Eagle, the renegade Apache chief, was a corpse!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AS IT SHOULD BE.

KIND reader, we have little more to record in connection with those we have followed through the persecutions, most villainous and criminal, of one who, although he owed a debt of gratitude to Red Eagle for guiding him to a secure retreat for his band, hesitated not to shoot him with intent to kill, when he saw that the Apache was about to deprive him of one of his victims. And this, although Black Bob was satisfied, upon first discovering the chief dancing at out the senseless old major in the rock basin, that Red Eagle was only having a little diversion, in accordance with his nature and rearing.

Such, indeed, was probably the case; for although under the influence of the "bad medicine," sent, as the Apache believed, by the Bad Spirit, Red Eagle well knew that his life would pay the forfeit—that he would meet the death by the rope, which Indians dread more than the most protracted tortures—did he slay the white-haired captive. Had such been his intention, he would, without doubt, have taken Major Malcolm far beyond the hearing of his yells and whoops, which the Apache thought a necessary accompaniment to his torture dance.

Dreadful as was the end of Robert Robertson at the hands of Red Eagle, all thought it just retribution for the dastard's deeds.

Red Eagle was buried, with much ceremony, by the men of Boulder City, the entire population turning out in their best "togs" at the imposing funeral.

Agreeably to the knowledge of the man from Taos, who knew pretty well what would have been the wishes of Red Eagle, as to the disposal of his body after death, the corpse, with war-robe wrapped around it, and arms and provisions by its side, was placed in a small cave, high up on the rocky range, and opening toward the rising sun. This was then walled up, to guard against beasts and birds of prey.

News soon reached Major Malcolm, that his elegant home had been burned to the ground, it having been fired by a burglar, known to the detectives as Sleepy Sim. He, however, had been killed by the watch-dog, and his body consumed with the dwelling. The former lodgings of this Sleepy Sim having been searched, letters were found which proved him to have been a pal of Robert Robertson. The major, hearing this, had no doubt that the burglar had been hired to burn the mansion by Robertson, and was then to join the latter in New Mexico.

It was sad news for the old gentleman and his daughter.

Their beautiful home was destroyed; but when Maude and her father thought upon the miraculous escapes they had had from death, and the plots that had been planned and practiced for their ruin—all of which had been mercifully frustrated—they could only feel thankful that their lives had been spared, and that their pitiless enemy was forever beyond the power of harming them. All had ended well.

The future promised every happiness to Maude, for she had the blessing of her father on

her approaching marriage with the man she loved.

The change in Major Malcolm caused both Will and Maude to rejoice greatly. They paid him every attention, and he was forced to admit to himself that he had been a foolish and misguided man, in allowing his love of money to drive from his mind one thought of his daughter's comfort and happiness.

Will Stone telegraphed at once to Denver for workmen and lumber, as well as furniture for two comfortable homes. He ordered also, the necessary quartz-mills, furnaces and machinery for the "Bentley Bonanza."

Although the major, his fair daughter and Will were a most happy trio, their happiness and gratitude were surpassed by another, of whom they saw much, and in whom they took great interest.

These were none other than Bill Bentley, "The Man from Taos," and "Nannie an' ther kid."

Maud Malcolm, when satisfied by the manner and actions of her father, that he was entirely cured of his mania for accumulating wealth, beyond the ample fortune that yet, with all his losses, remained to him, gave him the twenty thousand dollars which she had brought from St. Louis, and which she had kept safely when captured by the bandit.

Jim Duncan and Cheeky Charley were followed up by a posse of miners from Boulder City. The two escaped outlaws were found dead, with revolvers in each hand, each being shot in the breast; while near the corpses lay the express-box and mail-bag, which had been stolen from the coach. Bunches of greenbacks, also, lay upon the grass by the side of each.

They had evidently quarreled over the division of the spoils, and each had met death at the hands of the other.

Thus were their criminal lives ended, and the ten thousand dollars, which his bankers had sent to Major Malcolm, were now recovered.

Thus was the money, so badly needed by the Malcolms at that time, restored to them; but this gave no pleasure to Will, for he had promised himself the pleasure of sharing his little fortune with those whom he loved.

Both the major and his daughter were much puzzled at the extensive preparations of Will and Bentley, for the former had told neither of them anything in regard to the bonanza. Eventually, however, the secret leaked out; and then Major Malcolm insisted upon making a loan to Stone and Bentley, the owners of the Bentley Bonanza, of twenty thousand dollars on mortgage. This would enable them to push matters and enter extensively into the mining business.

In three months from the tragic and impressive death of Red Eagle, the little valley reached by the dark ravine had in it all the buildings necessary to work the extensive mine that had been discovered in so singular a manner by Bag-Juice Bill. A row of neat cabins were erected by the miners; and, as a large spring had been discovered, it proved to be a most delightful place for a residence.

Furnaces and crushers were in full blast, and old miners predicted that the "find" would prove the richest that had been struck within two hundred miles, up or down the range.

But on one of the foot-hills near the burg two residences, both exactly alike, even to out-buildings and arbors, had been erected; each being also furnished alike. They stood near a grove of weirdly singing and swaying pines, the balsamic scent of which permeated the bracing mountain air.

These were the homes of the two trios, Maude and Will having been wedded, and the major making his home with them; and Bill Bentley, with his wife and boy, occupying the other.

Major Malcolm had long thought of a plan, born of the erection of these two dwellings by Boulder Bill, and which he carried out by writing to a contractor and builder in St. Louis, without saying anything of his intentions to those whom he loved, to erect two mansions upon his grounds, alike in every respect, and counterparts of the one that had been destroyed by the incendiary.

This was done, and the delight of the two households, a year later, when they all journeyed to the "States" at this proof of the old gentleman's affection, was unbounded.

At the end of a year, when this trip was taken as a celebration, the firm of Stone & Bentley found themselves millionaires, with the prospect of being bonanza kings in the near future.

Their liberality was the means of building up a beautiful town on the site of the two rows of slab shanties which we have known as Boulder City. Long Horn was made the happy proprietor of a first-class hotel, and Pig Pretzel was also assisted in his struggles for the "pretzels and pier."

The latter was made comfortable and happy, yet he always had a fit of the "blues" and butted his big head against his bar when any one alluded to his having once shot a hole through a letter, in the hand of Will Stone.

Thus leaving our friends, we will bring our story to a close, merely asking kind leave to repeat, with satisfaction, that Bill Bentley, alias Bag-Juice Bill, alias the Man from Taos, with

"Nannie an' ther kid," were as happy as the days were long, but not more so than were Major Malcolm, his daughter Maude, and his son-in-law, William Stone, alias Boulder Bill.

But sadness will, now and then, rule even these, though it be but for a time.

It is when they stand before that walled-up cave, high up the range—the tomb of Red Eagle, the renegade Apache chief, and which is covered with flowering vines.

THE END.

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